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VOLUME 42

JACKSONIAN DEMOCRACY IN MISSISSIPPI

By

EDWIN ARTHUR MILES

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By

EDWIN ARTHUR MILES

University of Houston

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PREFACE

The author cannot predict whether an assistant in the Cataloging Division of the Library of Congress will choose to prepare the printed catalogue card for this volume to read "Jacksonian Democracy in Mississippi" or "Jacksonian democracy in Mississippi." Nor does he particularly care. He has endeavored to treat both the evolution of the Mississippi Democratic party during the Jackson era and the development of political democracy within the state during the same period.

Although the main narrative of this volume extends from the presidential campaign of 1824 through the reunion of the Democratic and State Rights parties in 1839, the author has not attempted to set exact outside dates for the study. Some threads of the story begin before the earlier date, while others extend far beyond the latter year. Jackson's victory in Mississippi in 1824, for example, had been won largely on the battlefield of New Orleans in 1815, while the adoption of an anti-bank crusade and the re-emphasis upon state rights principles by the Mississippi Democracy in 1839 had repercussions that were widely felt in the following decades.

The author wishes to make the following acknowledgments: to the *Journal of Southern History* for permission to republish in an altered form portions of an article, "Andrew Jackson and Senator George Poindexter," which originally appeared in the February, 1958, issue of that journal (XXIV, 51-66); to W. Magruder Drake, John E. Gonzales, and Maud Thomas, who called to his attention certain sources uncovered in their own researches in Mississippi history; to Cecil Johnson, J. Carlyle Sitterson, Christopher Crittenden, and Mary L. Hatley, who read an earlier draft of the manuscript and made suggestions for its revision. He especially wishes to express his heartfelt gratitude to Fletcher M. Green for his friendly counsel, boundless patience, and admirable dexterity in the use of a red pencil.

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JACKSONIAN DEMOCRACY IN MISSISSIPPI

CHAPTER I

"THE HOG ROUND FOR OLD HICKRY"

"I shant elect for Mr. Adams, but mean to go the hog round for Old Hickry."

"William S. Yarrow" to the public[1]

On Friday morning, January 4, 1828, the residents of Natchez, joined by many persons from the neighboring countryside, awaited anxiously the arrival of the steamer *Pocahontas* at the landing "under-the-Hill." Among that vessel's passengers was General Andrew Jackson, en route to New Orleans to participate in the celebration of the thirteenth anniversary of his glorious victory near that city. Natchez, too, wished to honor Old Hickory, and this was the day that he had set aside to accept its accolade.

The report had circulated that the *Pocahontas*, which had tied up three miles north of Natchez on the previous night, would reach the city landing about ten-thirty. But long before that hour the populace had turned out to greet the Old Hero. The bluff overlooking the river was crowded with young and old, impatient to catch a glimpse of the boat that bore the famed soldier. As mid-morning drew near, "a white smoke, curling like a mist over the tops of the cypress trees," heralded the approach of the steamer. Loud huzzas rang our from the hills, followed shortly by the thunder of cannon sounded in honor of the city's guest.

Natchez had not seen such a good-sized crowd since the visit of the Marquis de Lafayette three years earlier. Former United States Senator Thomas Buck Reed, chairman of the committee to plan the day's festivities, boarded the *Pocahontas* and accompanied the Old Hero and his party ashore. The cheers of the citizenry and the roar of the artillery resounded until the procession reached Purnell's Hotel. There Senator Reed delivered the official welcome of the city. Standing in an open barouche, Jackson, his head uncovered, heard himself lauded as a "benefactor to your country" whose services "can never be forgotten." In reply he thanked the citizens of Natchez for their "generous kindness" in recognition of his "humble exertions."

To Jackson's quarters at Purnell's Hotel divers friends and strangers, including many veterans of the Louisiana campaign, came to pay their respects. A committee from the Mississippi General Assembly extended formal greetings on behalf of the state. At four o'clock

[1] Port Gibson *Correspondent*, October 6, 1827.

Major General Samuel L. Winston presided at a public dinner in honor of the distinguished visitor. That night, at the conclusion of a ball attended by "an assembly of beauty, fashion and accomplishments," Jackson and his entourage took leave of their Natchez hosts and reembarked on the *Pocahontas*.[2]

What was the basis of Jackson's widespread popularity in Natchez and Mississippi as manifested during his visit in 1828? Above all his military record during the War of 1812 had captured heart and soul the imagination of the state's residents. The Battle of Horseshoe Bend against the Creeks had been fought and won in the Mississippi Territory. To commemorate that victory the territorial legislature had presented a "suitable sword" to the intrepid warrior.[3]

The triumph over the British at New Orleans added more brilliant luster to his fame. Jackson's presence at New Orleans, J. F. H. Claiborne later declared, was "a spectacle more sublime than the eye of man had ever witnessed." The victory especially created indissoluble bonds between the general and the people of Mississippi Territory, many of whom rendered invaluable services during the campaign. Jackson himself commended Major Thomas Hinds and his Mississippi Dragoons for exciting "the admiration of one army and the astonishment of the other." "The dragoons of Mississippi were not numerous," he said in 1828, "but steadiness and audacity made their charges irresistible."[4]

In later years the memory of Jackson's splendid victory evoked fond recollections among the residents of Mississippi. At militia musters officers and men often swapped anecdotes of the Battle of 'Orleans. ("We who were behind the cotton bales saw how he did it. We just looked on in amaisment; and he marched up to them with a bale of cotton in one pocket and a hogsit of shugar in tother, and said he would mash them to flitters if they didnt just make themselves scarce.") "To the glorious Eighth of January"—or a similar expression—was invariably conspicuous among the regular toasts pledged at public dinners; and special celebrations were often held to observe the anniversary of that epochal day. The battlefield was a popular mecca for Mississippians visiting in New Orleans. "We stood upon the spot

[2] Natchez *Statesman and Gazette*, January 3, 10, 17, 1828; Washington *United States Telegraph*, February 4, 1828; Reed to Jackson, January 3, 1828, Andrew Jackson Papers, Library of Congress; *Mississippi House Journal*, 11 Sess. (1828), 126.

[3] *Mississippi Territory Session Laws* (1813), 32.

[4] Natchez *Statesman and Gazette*, July 12, 1827; W. H. Sparks, *The Memories of Fifty Years: Containing Brief Biographical Notices of Distinguished Americans, and Anecdotes of Remarkable Men; Interspersed with Scenes and Incidents Occurring During a Long Life of Observation Chiefly Spent in the Southwest* (Philadelphia, 1870), 325; *Niles' Weekly Register* (Baltimore), VII (February 25, 1815), 404; Reply to the Delegates from Mississippi, 1828 undated, Jackson Papers.

where Jackson counselled, fought and conquered," wrote Richard C. Langdon of Natchez in 1820, "and whenever we have revisited the field, have felt the blood rush warmer, through the heart, with the recollections of that eventful day, of Jackson's fame and of his country's glory." In vain did anti-Jackson orators and editors contend that Old Hickory's popularity in Mississippi rested almost exclusively on his military laurels. "Take from General Jackson his successful battle of New-Orleans and what are his pretensions?" asked James Cornell of Port Gibson in 1824. But most Mississippians cherished the firm conviction that the Eighth of January obviated the necessity of more commonplace qualifications. "We hailed him in war," said a resident of Adams County in 1823. "We will not desert him in peace."[5]

Jackson's standing among Mississippians was enhanced by the fact that he was the product of a frontier society. No stranger to Mississippi soil, he had visited Natchez as early as 1790. It was near "Old Greenville," two years later, that he first exchanged wedding vows with Rachel Donelson Robards. In subsequent trading expeditions he gained the friendship of many residents of the Mississippi Territory.[6]

As a westerner, Jackson entertained views on Indian policy that were heartily approved in Mississippi, where in 1828 over one half of the land still remained in the hands of the Choctaws and Chickasaws. Following the controversial Seminole campaign of 1818, Mississippians did not join in Henry Clay's condemnation of the general's alleged headstrong action in invading Spanish Florida and executing two British citizens. On the contrary, the legislature of 1819 adopted a resolution declaring that his conduct "merits the approbation of his country." In Washington Representative George Poindexter took up the cudgels for Old Hickory. On behalf of the new states of Mississippi and Alabama, he offered thanks to Jackson for protecting "us in the time of our infancy . . . against the inexorable Red Sticks and their allies" and for compelling "them to relinquish the possession of our lands."[7]

In 1820 the Mississippi congressional delegation unanimously favored Jackson to serve as principal negotiator with the Choctaw Indians for a further cession of their territory within the state. "The

[5] "The Autobiography of Wiley P. Harris," in Dunbar Rowland, *Courts, Judges, and Lawyers of Mississippi, 1798-1935* (Jackson, 1935), 274; Port Gibson *Correspondent*, August 26, 1824, October 6, 1827; Natchez *Mississippi Republican*, October 31, 1820, October 15, 1823.

[6] Mrs. Dunbar Rowland [Eron Opha Moore Rowland] *Andrew Jackson's Campaign Against the British, or the Mississippi Territory in the War of 1812, Concerning the Military Operations of the Americans, Creek Indians, British and Spanish, 1812-1815* (New York, 1926), 12-25.

[7] Natchez *Mississippi State Gazette*, June 2, 1819; *Debates and Proceedings in the Congress of the United States . . . to May 27, 1824*, 42 vols. (Washington, 1834-1856), 15 Cong., 2 Sess., 984.

people of Mississippi believe that you alone can succeed with the Choctaws," Senator Thomas Hill Williams wrote the Tennessean. The resulting Treaty of Doak's Stand opened a vast new area to white settlement within the state and Mississippians were lavish in their praise of the Hero of New Orleans. "You will live in our affections to the latest period of time," wrote Poindexter, now governor, "and I trust our posterity will not be unmindful of the obligations, conferred on their ancestors." The Mississippi General Assembly in 1821 selected a site on the banks of the Pearl River within the ceded area as the new seat of government for the state. Jackson, the legislators' name for the new capital, was an appropriate and popular choice.[8]

Although Jackson was the last of the major candidates to enter the presidential canvass of 1824, the outcome of that election in Mississippi once again palpably demonstrated the exalted esteem with which he was regarded in the state.

Secretary of the Treasury William H. Crawford of Georgia, the heir of the "Virginia Dynasty," had few advocates in Mississippi, except in Monroe County, which had been predominantly settled by immigrants from Georgia, and in Wilkinson County, where a local faction opposed George Poindexter, Crawford's most inveterate foe in Mississippi. But the Georgian's reputation for conservatism and his designation as the caucus nominee aroused little enthusiasm for his candidacy in the state, and only a partial slate of electors pledged to him was presented to the voters.[9]

Although a westerner, Henry Clay possessed even less political strength in Mississippi. In 1822 Thomas B. Reed, a native Kentuckian, wrote his old friend Clay that the latter's popularity had diminished materially because of "the part you took upon the question growing out of the Seminole War." At first Reed favored Clay, perhaps influenced by the fact that George Poindexter, a long-time political rival, was "traversing the country and addressing the people . . . as though he were the *pensioned* Orator of John Q. Adams."[10] But eventually even Reed abandoned Clay, and no ticket committed to "Harry of the West" was offered to the electorate of Mississippi.

John Quincy Adams was the most formidable candidate in Mississippi prior to Jackson's entry into the race. One by one, leading newspapers of the state came out in his favor. His supporters painstakingly emphasized the education, training, moral and religious character of the Secretary of State and endorsed "the principle which

[8] Christopher Rankin to Jackson, May 16, 1820, Williams to Jackson, March 29, 1819, Poindexter to Jackson, October 25, 1820, Jackson Papers; Natchez *Mississippi Republican*, October 31, 1820.

[9] Poindexter to Jackson, May 4, 1823, Jackson Papers; Port Gibson *Correspondent*, July 15, 1824.

[10] Reed to Clay, August 2, September 5, 1822, Henry Clay Papers, Library of Congress.

guarantees the rights of seniority in civil as well as military promotions, wherever grave and weighty reasons do not interfere to prevent their exercise." Conceding that "we are as it were, upon the theatre of Gen. Jackson's toils, his perils and his glory," the Mississippi adherents of Adams, who hoped that the Hero of New Orleans would eventually withdraw from the race, prudently refrained from direct attacks upon the general. Ironically one of the most forcible arguments in favor of Adams was that he had championed Old Hickory's action in the Seminole campaign. "If it does not comport with the views of the people to elevate General Jackson to the presidency," wrote one Adams partisan, "the least they can do is to support the statesman and patriot who most ably defended him against the reproaches of the British cabinet, and the clamours of his private and political enemies." "We know," said one Mississippi editor favorable to Adams, "that general Jackson himself is the political friend of Mr. Adams, and would have supported his interest, were he not himself a candidate." "The friends of John Q. Adams, are the friends of the General," said another.[11]

But the cold, astringent, intellectual Adams, the complete antithesis of the warm-blooded Hero, did not elicit a sympathetic response from Mississippians. The editor of the Port Gibson *Correspondent*, though himself an advocate of the Secretary of State, once attempted to express the manner in which the average citizen of the state appraised the candidacies of the two leading contenders for the Presidency: " '[Jackson] is a man after my own heart,' says one [Mississippian]— 'He is a staunch republican, and would sooner suffer torture, than be deprived of the liberty of expressing an opinion once deliberately formed, and I like him for that: as to this Adams, and all the fuss they make about his qualifications, and the like, I have not time to look into those things, except on Sunday, and then I have not the documents.' " Old Hickory suited the Mississippian. "Besides, he's as valiant as a lion; and as to his life, when the country's in danger, you don't catch him slinking and skulking, and setting the rest to fighting, and then creeping out; but at it he goes, hammer and tongs, and if a fellow happens to be along, is I was, down at Orleans, why he feels a sort of encouragement."[12]

Despite popular support for Jackson, Adams retained an influential following in Mississippi. An informal caucus of the members of the state General Assembly in early 1824 tested the relative popularity of the various candidates and it was conclusively evident that only Jackson and Adams had any substantial strength among the legislators. Between the two a tie vote had resulted and Speaker Cowles Mead cast

[11] Natchez *Mississippian*, August 9, 16, 1823, February 7, October 8, 1824; Port Gibson *Correspondent*, May 27, 1824.
[12] Port Gibson *Correspondent*, September 16, 1824.

the deciding ballot for Adams. The most noticeable partiality for the New Englander came from the Mississippi River counties of the southwest, the earliest settled region of the state. Natchez in particular was regarded as an Adams stronghold. On the other hand, the Mississippi delegation in Congress, Senators Thomas Hill Williams and David Holmes and Representative Christopher Rankin, advocated the election of Jackson.[13]

While the Old Hero won an able champion when Thomas B. Reed deserted the Clay ranks, the Jackson forces were disappointed in their efforts to win the support of George Poindexter. In October, 1822, Major William B. Lewis had solicited the latter's advocacy of the Jackson cause. "It is thought," Lewis wrote, that "you will feel no unwillingness to assist in this undertaking."[14]

The following spring Poindexter appeared entirely receptive to such overtures. In a letter to Jackson, seeking the Old Hero's aid in securing the vacant federal judgeship in Mississippi, he expressed a "deep solicitude, that the American people, would rescue this Republic from the stain of ingratitude, and manifest their consideration of your eminent services, by tendering to you the first office in their gift." But the judgeship was conferred upon Peter Randolph, a recent resident of Virginia, and Poindexter's endorsement in the campaign of 1824 was bestowed upon John Quincy Adams. At the same time, however, he professed that he supported Adams only because Jackson's candidacy was doomed to failure.[15]

Many Adams supporters, like Poindexter, attempted to depreciate Jackson's chances in the race—even in Mississippi. "There is little doubt," said James Cornell of the Port Gibson *Correspondent*, that the "decided opinion of a large majority of our citizens is in favor of the advancement of Mr. Adams to the Chief Magistracy of the Union." But Representative Christopher Rankin, writing from Washington, warned his constituents not to be deceived by such claims that the Old Hero's cause was hopeless.[16]

In Mississippi, as in the rest of the nation, personalities overshadowed issues in the election of 1824. Jackson's partisans attempted to capitalize upon his senatorial vote for the general survey bill of

[13] *Ibid.*, April 17, 1824; Natchez *Mississippi Republican*, April 28, May 5, 1824; Woodville *Republican*, March 23, 1824; William Johnson to Jackson, August 16, 1824, Jackson Papers.

[14] Lewis to Poindexter, October 10, 1822, J. F. H. Claiborne Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson. Hereinafter cited as Claiborne Papers, Jackson.

[15] Poindexter to Jackson, May 4, 1823, William Johnson to Jackson, August 16, 1824, Jackson Papers.

[16] Port Gibson *Correspondent*, December 4, 1823; Woodville *Republican*, March 23, 1824.

that year, while his opponents criticized his endorsement of the tariff of 1824; but these issues stirred little excitement in the state.[17] It was a remarkably placid campaign, lacking the coarse vilification that characterized later presidential canvasses involving Old Hickory.

The race in Mississippi resulted in an impressive victory for Jackson, who polled a majority in every county.[18] In February, 1825, Representative Rankin cast the state's vote for the Old Hero in the special election by the House of Representatives. Mississippians decried that body's selection of Adams. That Jackson was represented as one who had been fraudulently denied the office to which he was entitled did not tend to weaken his extraordinary popularity in the state.

The presidential campaign of 1828 began almost as soon as the election of Adams had been determined in 1825. It appeared inevitable that three years hence the general and his successful rival would again be the chief contenders for the presidency. Though few doubted that the Hero of New Orleans would once again receive Mississippi's vote, his friends in that state bestirred themselves early. In October, 1826, a public meeting in Woodville endorsed his candidacy. Jackson's former ward, Anthony Butler, then a resident of Lawrence County, assured his quondam guardian that "Tennessee itself is scarcely more unanimous for you than the Citizens of Mississippi." In December, 1826, George Poindexter wrote Secretary of State Henry Clay that "all the talents of the state are in favor of Mr. Adams," but he lamented that "there is among a certain class of Citizens an enthusiastic ardour in favor of General Jackson, which extinguishes the lights of reason, and argument, and moves with giant strides to his support." "Jackson is as certain of . . . [Mississippi's] vote," said the editor of the Port Gibson *Correspondent,* "as Adams is the vote of Connecticut."[19]

For three years the presidential question permeated almost every strata of state politics. In January, 1826, Thomas B. Reed, former state attorney general, was elected by the General Assembly to fill the unexpired term of United States Senator David Holmes, recently elected governor. In 1811 Reed had arrived penniless at Natchez; fifteen years later the former Kentuckian was generally recognized as the foremost member of the Adams County bar. Supercilious in manner and ostentatious in dress, he commanded respect though he failed to gain the universal affection of his fellow citizens. Yet even his enemies conceded that he was endowed with exceptional talents;

[17] Woodville *Republican,* April 20, September 14, 1824.
[18] Natchez *Mississippi State Gazette,* November 20, 1824.
[19] Woodville *Republican,* October 7, 1826; Butler to Jackson, September 4, 1826, Jackson Papers; Poindexter to Clay, December 1, 1826, Henry Clay Papers; Port Gibson *Correspondent,* December 14, 1826.

and George Poindexter, the most implacable of them all, acknowledged that he was "a very able lawyer and advocate."[20]

Reed supplanted Powhatan Ellis, who had received an interim appointment from Governor Walter M. Leake. It was expected that the new senator, who had belatedly embraced the Jackson cause in 1824, would join the congressional clique dedicated to the task of elevating the general to the White House. Shortly after Reed's arrival in the nation's capital, however, disquieting information reached his constituents in Mississippi.

When Reed took his seat, the "Panama question" was the most controversial political issue before the Senate. On behalf of the United States, President Adams had accepted Simon Bolivar's invitation to send representatives to a meeting of American republics at Panama. Seeking to embarass the administration, Jackson's partisans opposed American participation on the grounds that the representatives of the United States would be forced to sit with delegates of mixed blood and might make entangling alliances jeopardizing the nation's sovereignty. Reed, who reached Washington just as the Senate was concluding debate on a resolution concerning the expediency of the mission, professed that he had been unable to examine all the documents relating to the issue and requested to be excused from voting on the measure. Over the protest of John Randolph of Roanoke, the Senate granted its new member the indulgence he sought.[21]

Reed's action was unpopular among his constituents, who generally opposed the mission. "We wish no man who represents us to shirk from responsibility," wrote Samuel T. King, editor of the Woodville *Republican*. "We wish him to act." In vain did the belabored senator avow that he "was not sent to the Senate to make one President or unmake another."[22] His refusal to record his opinion on the issue was interpreted as a friendly gesture toward the Adams administration. Subsequent events revealed that his deportment had not been misconstrued.

In Mississippi the mounting opposition to Reed, whose term expired in March, 1827, rallied around his predecessor, Powhatan Ellis. Not even his most ardent partisans maintained that the tall, courtly native Virginian who claimed descent from Pocahontas was Reed's equal in ability, but he was known to be unequivocal in his devotion to Jackson's candidacy. A new senatorial election would be held by the

[20] J. F. H. Claiborne, *Life and Correspondence of John A. Quitman*, 2 vols. (New York, 1860), I, 95; Henry S. Foote, *Bench and Bar of the South and Southwest* (St. Louis, 1876), 24; Natchez *Gazette*, February 11, 1826; Poindexter to Clay, December 1, 1826, Henry Clay Papers.

[21] *Register of Debates in Congress*, 14 vols. (Washington, 1825-1837), 19 Cong., 1 Sess., 341-43.

[22] Woodville *Republican*, April 22, 1826; Port Gibson *Correspondent*, July 27, 1826.

General Assembly in January, 1827; hence Reed's fate hinged on the legislative elections of August, 1826.

When Reed returned to Mississippi in the summer of 1826, he vehemently denied that he was an opponent of Jackson or an advocate of the Adams administration. At a speech in Jefferson County he declared that "it is well known, that Mr. Adams, was not my choice, as President of the United States, nor was he the choice of a majority of our people." But as long as Adams administered the federal government with prudence, Reed would "not consent to inflict incurable evils upon the country, by paralyzing his wisest measures, because he was not the President of my choice." In several public speeches he challenged anyone to prove that he had ever opposed Jackson's pretensions to the Presidency.[23]

Nevertheless Jackson's partisans in Mississippi were determined to replace Reed with the more dependable Ellis. They charged that the incumbent "was considered at Washington as belonging heart & soul to the Federal party." Jackson himself was urged to use his influence to counteract the senator's repeated asseverations that he was not an advocate of the administration. In Lawrence County, Anthony Butler, pledging his support to Ellis, was chosen one of the county's representatives to the General Assembly, but Joseph Cooper, his colleague, was known to be favorable to Reed. Undaunted, Butler and his cohorts circulated several memorials throughout the county instructing Cooper to vote for Ellis. Their exertions were not in vain, for Cooper agreed to obey the instructions.[24]

The national administration was also concerned with the senatorial race in Mississippi. "Will Mr. Reed or his opponent be elected?" inquired Henry Clay of George Poindexter. The incumbent was "an old friend," the Kentuckian wrote, "who, if he has some eccentricity, possesses nevertheless redeeming talents and qualities." In Clay's opinion, there was "certainly a wide difference, in intellectual attainments, between the two gentlemen, in favor of Reed."[25]

"My information as to your State is imperfect," Clay had written his Mississippi correspondent. How true, or the Secretary of State would never have penned such a letter to "Old Poins," Reed's unrelenting personal and political adversary. *"I could have elected Mr. Reed* if I had chosen to interfere in his favor," Poindexter replied, "but *he knows* he has put *that* out of the scope of possibil[it]y, unless I prostrated those high principles of honor; which I hope ever to cherish." Clay's letter afforded Poindexter, though confined to a sick

[23] Port Gibson *Correspondent,* July 27, November 9, 1826.
[24] Isaac L. Baker to Jackson, August 20, 1826, Butler to Jackson, September 4, 1826, Jackson Papers.
[25] Clay to Poindexter, October 7, 1826, Claiborne Papers, Jackson.

bed at his home in Wilkinson County, an opportunity to settle an old score with his enemy. Although himself a friend of the administration, or so he told Clay, Poindexter permitted his friend Abram M. Scott to circulate the Secretary's letter to injure Reed's candidacy. Here, so the whispers circulated, was irrefutable proof that Reed was a member of the Adams party.[26]

Meanwhile the senator had returned to his duties in Washington. Soon after his arrival there, in December, 1826, he called on John Quincy Adams at the White House. The President noted in his diary that Reed spoke "in a manner somewhat apologetic of a speech which he made at a dinner given to him in his own State." The senator intimated that he "was obliged to say that he preferred General Jackson for the Presidency, although this was not his real sentiment." Adams, grateful for any support he might receive from Congress, assured Reed that he had "not the slightest resentment on account of that speech."[27]

Although Reed told the President that he had a "favorable prospect" of re-election, his optimism proved illusory. The unremitting efforts of such men as Poindexter and Butler, acting from dissimilar motives, bore fruit. Clay's casual concern for the incumbent's candidacy was magnified all out of proportion to its importance. "The whole artillery of Executive influence was brought into action on this question," Butler wrote Jackson after the election. When the General Assembly elected a senator on January 4, 1827, Ellis won by a comfortable margin of twenty-seven to sixteen. "Our majority is greater than the most sanguine of us anticipated," wrote the jubilant Butler. Thomas B. Reed had been taught the power of Jackson's name in Mississippi.[28]

The presidential question was also injected into the congressional race of 1826. The state's lone representative, Christopher Rankin, died in March of that year, and there were five aspirants to the vacancy: Adam L. Bingaman and Beverly R. Grayson of Adams County, Benjamin F. Stockton of Claiborne, John H. Norton of Marion, and William Haile of Wilkinson. Of the five only Haile supported Jackson whole-heartedly. "He is considered inferior on the score of talents to most of his competitors," a friend wrote Jackson, "but his politicks are most acceptible [*sic*] to the people." Haile prepared a ticket which he distributed throughout the state. It read simply:

[26] Poindexter to Clay, December 1, 1826, Henry Clay Papers; Port Gibson *Correspondent,* September 27, 1828; Natchez *Southern Galaxy,* January 1, 1829.

[27] Charles Francis Adams (ed.), *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams, Comprising Portions of His Diary from 1795 to 1848,* 12 vols. (Philadelphia, 1874-1877), VIII, 208.

[28] Butler to Jackson, January 4, 1827, Jackson Papers; *Mississippi House Journal,* 10 Sess. (1827), 33.

FOR CONGRESS
THE JACKSON TICKET

William Haile of Wilkinson, will be supported by the friends of General Jackson.[29]

Haile's opponents objected to his introduction of the presidential issue into the congressional canvass. "It appears to us entirely useless to agitate this question of the next Presidency at so early a period," protested one editor. On the other hand, it was pointed out that in case no presidential candidate received a majority of the electoral votes in the election of 1828 would again be decided by the House of Representatives. In such a case, Rankin's successor would cast Mississippi's vote. There must not be another "corrupt bargain," it was urged, at least not with her vote. All of the candidates pledged themselves to support Mississippi's choice in case of such an eventuality.[30]

Haile won his election easily, although he did not receive the support of all the Jackson partisans; for sectional influences within the state were equally as strong as presidential considerations. The victorious candidate was accused of riding the Jackson "horse" as a "hobby," but as Anthony Butler pointed out, "the people very much approved the Hobby on which he was mounted and let him ride it into Congress with great ease."[31]

In Mississippi the Jackson electors of 1824 had been nominated and endorsed by public meetings throughout the state. In August, 1827, a public meeting in Hinds County proposed that the Jackson electoral slate for the forthcoming campaign be selected at a state convention to be held in January, 1828. The idea caught fire and public meetings were held throughout the state, each county choosing one delegate. On January 7, 1828, the convention met in the state Capitol. James C. Wilkins of Adams County, the commission merchant who had captained the Natchez Rifle Corps during the Louisiana campaign, presided. General Thomas Hinds of Jefferson, Wiley P. Harris of Pike, and William Dowsing of Washington were chosen as the Jackson standard bearers.[32]

Meanwhile the Adams forces were not inactive. On December 24, 1827, an assembly "opposed to the election of general Jackson" met at the Steamboat Hotel in Natchez and issued a call for a public meeting on January 23. In a circular to the public the organizers of the meeting

[29] Isaac L. Baker to Jackson, August 20, 1826, Jackson Papers; Port Gibson *Correspondent*, June 8, 1826.

[30] Port Gibson *Correspondent*, June 8, July 6, 1826; Jackson *State Journal*, July 29, 1826.

[31] Butler to Jackson, September 4, 1826, Jackson Papers.

[32] Port Gibson *Correspondent*, August 25, September 22, November 3, 24, 1827; Natchez *Statesman and Gazette*, January 24, 1828. Joseph Dunbar was later chosen to replace Hinds, who became a candidate for Congress. Natchez *Statesman and Gazette*, September 11, 1828.

denied that they were *"partizans of Mr. Adams."* But it "would be doing him great injustice," the circular continued, "not to accord him *pre-eminent talents; great experience; extensive political information, both foreign and domestic; the purest patriotism;* and (when compared with his only competitor,) *superior* fitness for the chief magistracy of our union."[33]

Thus, half apologetically, the Adams campaign opened in Mississippi. On the day appointed the Natchez meeting was held in the Adams County courthouse. Stephen Duncan, president of the Bank of Mississippi, presided. Similar meetings were held in other counties. The Adams forces of Hinds County met on February 5 at Jackson; and on February 19 administration partisans of Claiborne County assembled at Port Gibson to brand Jackson as unqualified for civil office. The Adams electors, ratified by such public meetings, were Isaac R. Nicholson of Copiah, William Long of Wayne, and Edward McGehee of Wilkinson County.[34]

The supporters of Adams were much more vigorous in their denunciations of Jackson than they had been in 1824. Two pamphlets attacking his candidacy were printed at Natchez. One dealt with his record as military commander during the War of 1812, and the other with his exercise of martial law in New Orleans following his victory over the British. Much was heard of the general's "peculiar unfitness for the station." Late in the campaign an Adams rhymster wrote:

O, Andrew Jack, my Joe Jack,
  You'd better go to school,
A President you know, Jack
  Must not be a fool:
For there's writing and there's reading Jack
  Which must be done you know,
Which can't be done by proxy,
  O Andrew Jack my Joe.[35]

Two months prior to the presidential election of 1828 Mississippi chose a new representative in Congress. William Haile, the incumbent, was "a man of great vivacity and fine natural talents," but during his term of office he had displayed more enthusiasm for John Barleycorn than for the Hero of New Orleans. There were now other aspirants

[33] Broadside in Book "G," Claiborne Papers, Jackson.

[34] Natchez *Ariel*, February 2, 1828; Port Gibson *Correspondent*, February 23, 1828; Natchez *Southern Galaxy*, July 3, 1828.

[35] Samuel Clement, *Truth is No Slander; Therefore Read—Enquire—Reflect* (Natchez, 1828); *A Letter to Edward Livingston, Esq., Delegate from Louisiana to the General Congress at Washington-City on the Subject of the Speech Delivered by Him, at Washington, at the Late Celebration of the Anniversary of the 8th of January, 1815* (Natchez, 1828); Port Gibson *Correspondent*, October 4, 1828.

who recalled his earlier success as a "whole-hog Jackson man" and were eager to attach their candidacies to the same popular cause. Fearing that a multiplicity of candidates favorable to Old Hickory might enable an Adams partisan to win the race, the Jackson leaders in Natchez held a meeting on May 22 to nominate the state's own hero, General Thomas Hinds, a resident of Jefferson County and a good friend of Jackson, for Haile's seat. David Dickson of Hinds County, another Jackson adherent, also announced his candidacy and protested the manner by which Hinds had been nominated. "The members of this Natchez meeting are powerful in talents, influence and means," he protested; "unfortunate[ly] for me there is a great contrast in our relative situations." Against a less formidable opponent than Hinds, Dickson might have been able to captialize upon the prevailing sentiment against Natchez and Adams County in other parts of the state, but Hinds was universally popular throughout Mississippi.[36]

Haile, Hinds, and Dickson vied with each other as "whole-hog Jackson" candidates. "What do the people want with such men in Congress?" queried one editor. "Do they need a member of Congress, a Legislator, merely to *tag* after *Andrew Jackson?* Do they wish only such men as Jackson may hold between his thumb and finger and mould them to his will?" But such protests were ineffective for the popular Hinds won decisively. Adam L. Bingaman of Adams County, the only administration candidate, finished third behind Dickson. Haile, whose bacchanalian carousals during the canvass had appalled many of his constituents, finished last.[37]

Sectional issues were of greater consequence in Mississippi during the campaign of 1828 than four years earlier. Sentiment in the state regarding the tariff, divided in 1824, was mounting against the protective system advocated by the Adams administration. The Jackson party in Mississippi also captialized upon the failure of the administration to secure the removal of the Indians in the South. Mississippians sympathized with the Georgians' demands that the Creeks and Cherokees be transported from the state. The Adams administration disputed Georgia's legislation to assume jurisdiction over the Indians within her borders and there was a threat of a clash between federal and state authority. In February, 1827, Representative Haile promised that Mississippi would spring to the defense of her sister state "if the bayonets of the General Government should on this ac-

[36] William B. Hamilton and Ruth K. Nuermberger, "An Appraisal of J. F. H. Claiborne, with His Annotated 'Memoranda' [1829-1840]," *Journal of Mississippi History,* VII (1945), 146 (hereinafter cited as "Claiborne's Memoranda"); Natchez *Statesman and Gazette,* May 29, 1828; Port Gibson *Correspondent,* June 14, 1828.

[37] Port Gibson *Correspondent,* August 2, 23, 1828; W. C. Harris to John A. Quitman, August 2, 1828, Claiborne Papers, Jackson.

count be turned against [her]." Haile's constituents impatiently sought the removal of the Choctaws and Chickasaws from Mississippi soil. "Our state," the representative said is 1828, "cannot submit much longer to . . . Indian incumbrance."[38]

The presidential campaign of 1828 in Mississippi was the most stirring yet conducted in that state. More than a year before the election Benjamin F. Stockton, editor of the Port Gibson *Correspondent,* was alarmed at the excitement that the presidential question generated. He almost wished that "there was some other way of making the President, if less republican, that would leave the fireside circle whole, and undissolved a peacefully organized society." Late the following summer he hoped to take a brief vacation from political arguments in Clinton, fast becoming Mississippi's most fashionable watering place. At Lindsay's Tavern he was well pleased with the accommodations, but alas he found no respite from politics. "Here as everywhere else," he wrote, "it is the first and last thing thought of. . . . Politics were fairly smoked—the whiff from your segar indicated its prevalence."[39]

Many a politician in Mississippi, recognizing that opposition to Jackson in the state promised no political rewards, climbed aboard the bandwagon of the Old Hero. Governor Gerard C. Brandon and William L. Sharkey were prominent among those termed "eleventh-hour Jackson men." Even George Poindexter, who had written so contemptuously of the Jackson party less than two years before, now supported the general. Jackson's victory in Mississippi in 1828 was even more one-sided than that of four years earlier. Of 8,690 votes cast, his electors polled 7,088 and again carried every county in the state. Only in the five counties bordering on the Mississippi River did he fail to capture at least 80 per cent of the votes.[40]

Jackson's overwhelming triumph was the product of many circumstances. Undoubtedly the unpopularity of the tariff and Indian policies of the Adams administration aided his cause, but the outcome of the canvass was to a large extent a personal victory for the Hero of New Orleans. Jackson's martial record had an especial appeal to Mississippians, for it was achieved, so to speak, almost in their own backyard, and citizens of the state were boastful of their own participation in his military campaigns. Jackson, too, was a product of the frontier, who Mississippians felt understood their problems, while they regarded Adams as an aristocratic easterner totally unsympathetic with their

[38] Port Gibson *Correspondent,* September 8, 1827; *Abridgment of the Debates of Congress from 1789 to 1856,* 16 vols. (New York, 1857-1861), 20 Cong., 2 Sess., 413; Haile to John A. Quitman, February 28, 1828, Claiborne Papers, Jackson.

[39] Port Gibson *Correspondent,* October 27, 1827, September 13, 1828.

[40] Natchez *Statesman and Gazette,* July 25, 1829; Natchez *Natchez,* June 26, 1830; J. F. H. Claiborne, *Mississippi as a Province, Territory and State with Biographical Notes of Eminent Citizens* (Jackson, 1880), 394; Poindexter to Jackson, September 5, 1828 (copy), Claiborne Papers, Jackson.

basic needs. To residents of the state Jackson could say: "I have saved your women and children from the tomahawk and scalping knife. I have protected your great emporium from flames, and from British myrmidons, and when all other resources failed, have obtained and annexed to your State, an extensive domain, adding wealth and numbers to your restricted limits."[41] Furthermore Jackson's managers had skillfully portrayed the Hero of New Orleans as one who had been deprived of the presidency by sinister means, and most Mississippians were proud of the role that their state had filled in avenging the so-called "corrupt bargain."

[41] Port Gibson *Correspondent*, November 3, 1827.

CHAPTER II

A STATE DIVIDED

> "Why do members of the legislature from the west, so uniformly oppose, either directly or indirectly, every measure which is brought forward, calculated to benefit us?"
>
> Monticello *Pearl River Advocate*[1]

Throughout Mississippi history, from territorial times to the twentieth century, sectional jealousies have significantly influenced internal politics. At the time of Jackson's inauguration there were four distinct areas of white settlement in the state, which more or less determined the existing sectional alignment. During the eighteen-twenties over one half of Mississippi lay within the Choctaw and Chickasaw nations and it was not until the next decade that the state exercised full sovereignty over that extensive region.

The oldest and wealthiest portion of the state was the former Natchez District, the area adjoining the Mississippi River from the Louisiana border to the Yazoo River. The district had recognized the surpremacy of the British and Spanish flags before the United States gained dominion of the area following the Pinckney Treaty of 1795 with Spain. Few travelers ever saw any part of Mississippi other than Natchez and the surrounding countryside along the river. Until the late eighteen-twenties that city, in Adams County, was the only important commercial center in the state. And as late as 1830 only in "Mother Adams" and the neighboring river counties had the plantation system triumphed in Mississippi. In that year the residents of the seven counties that had been formed from the old Natchez District constituted only 34 per cent of the white population, but possessed 65 per cent of the slaves, paid 69 per cent of the taxes, and owned 78 per cent of the assessed property value of the state.[2]

[1] Quoted in Natchez *Natchez,* May 22, 1830.

[2] The seven counties of this area were Adams (created 1799), Jefferson (created as Pickering County in 1799), Claiborne (1802), Wilkinson (1802), Warren (1809), Amite (1809), and Franklin (1809). Not all of the interior counties of Amite and Franklin lay in the old Natchez District, but partly in the area ceded by the Choctaw Indians in 1805. The story of the old Natchez District is told in Charles S. Sydnor, *A Gentleman of the Old Natchez Region: Benjamin L. C. Wailes* (Durham, 1938), 1-30; Dunbar Rowland (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Mississippi History, Comprising Sketches of Counties, Towns, Events, Institutions and Persons,* 2 vols. (Madison, 1907), II, 302-18; Sparks, *Memories of Fifty Years,* 321-27. The percentages of population are based on the federal census of 1830 as recorded in *The Statistics of Population of the United States . . . Compiled from the Original Returns of the Ninth Census . . .* (Washington,

To the east of the old Natchez District lay ten counties of the piney woods in that portion of the state ceded by the Choctaw Indians in 1805. Full United States jurisdiction over the territory south of the thirty-first degree of north latitude (an extension to the east of the Louisiana border) was not asserted until 1812. The piney woods possessed a society and economy quite different from that of the river counties, and there was "little communication and less sympathy" between the residents of the two sections. In east Mississippi, which John Francis Hamtramck Claiborne once termed "almost a distinct political organization," the soil was poorer and most of the settlers eked out a meager existence as herdsmen, lumbermen, and subsistence farmers. In 1830 east Mississippi accounted for 28 per cent of the white population, but its residents possessed only 14 per cent of the slaves, paid less than 13 per cent of the taxes, and owned only 15 per cent of the assessed property value of Mississippi.[3]

The third area of settlement in the state was procured from the Choctaw Indians in 1820 by the Treaty of Doak's Stand, negotiated by United States Commissioners Andrew Jackson and Thomas Hinds. By 1830 seven counties had been created from this so-called New Purchase, which lay to the north and to the east of the old Natchez District. The treaty of 1820 not only doubled the potential area of white settlement along the Mississippi River but opened up additional areas adjoining the Pearl, Big Black, and Yazoo Rivers. In the eighteen-twenties the upper Pearl River region was the fastest growing section of the state, attracting many settlers from the old Natchez District and the piney woods as well as from other states. Although the plantation system was extending into the New Purchase, it remained for the most part a region inhabited by small farmers. By 1830 approximately 30 per cent of the white and 18 per cent of the slave population resided in the counties of the Doak's Stand cession, but its residents paid only 13 per cent of the state's taxes and less than 4 per cent of the assessed property value of the state lay within the region.[4]

1872), 41-43. The percentages of taxation and assessed property values are based on the annual report of the state auditor in 1830. *Mississippi House Journal,* 14 Sess. (November, 1830), 49-51.

[3] The ten counties of this area (with the dates of their creation) were Wayne (1809), Greene (1811), Hancock (1812), Jackson (1812), Lawrence (1814), Pike (1815), Covington (1819), Perry (1820), and Jones (1826). For descriptions of this area during the early days of statehood see Sparks, *Memories of Fifty Years,* 332; Claiborne, *Mississippi,* 425; and two articles by Claiborne. "Rough Riding Down South," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* (New York, 1850—), XXV (June, 1862), 29, and "A Trip Through the Piney Woods," *Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society,* IX (1906), 487-538.

[4] Originally all of the area was included in Hinds County (created 1821). Subsequently Copiah (1823), Yazoo (1823), Simpson (1824), Washington (1827), Madison (1828), and Rankin (1828) counties were organized. The dispro-

To the east of the Tombigbee River was situated the fourth area of white inhabitation in Mississippi, separated from the Pearl River region by almost one hundred miles of the Choctaw nation. The Tombigbee area had been opened up following the Treaty of Chickasaw Council House, negotiated by Andrew Jackson in 1816; until 1820, when a survey revealed that a portion of the cession lay in Mississippi, it was assumed that the entire territory lay in Alabama. The Tombigbee counties of Monroe and Lowndes remained isolated from the rest of the state until after the final removal of the Choctaws following the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek in 1830. In that year the two counties contained less than 8 per cent of the white and approximately 3 per cent of the slave population of the state.[5]

Sectionalism within Mississippi did not parallel exactly the four areas of white settlement. The remote Tombigbee region played only an insignificant role in state politics. Within the old Natchez District the interior counties of Amite and Franklin did not docilely submit to the leadership of the river counties. In the New Purchase, Washington, the only county outside the Natchez District in which slaves comprised a majority of the population, had more in common with the other counties adjoining the Mississippi River than with the Pearl River region of the Doak's Stand cession.

During the eighteen-twenties there existed a community of interest between the piney woods and the upper Pearl River counties of the New Purchase that caused those sections to join forces on most political issues. Both areas were for the most part frontier regions whose economies were based on relatively small land holdings. Their legislators generally banded together against the representatives of the old Natchez District on such issues as internal improvements, banking, and state policies regarding Indians and slaves.

By far the most disputed question in state politics was internal improvements. Although the General Assembly approved several appropriation measures for roads connecting Jackson with various sections of the state, Mississippi's roads, which were maintained by the counties, were constantly in poor repair. But the inhabitants of the piney woods and the New Purchase attached particular stress upon the need for legislation to facilitate the navigation of the rivers that flowed through those regions. Particularly did they seek state aid to remove the sunken logs and overhanging trees that impeded traffic on the Pearl River, the avenue of trade serving eight interior counties.

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portionately small percentage of assessed property value in this region was attributable to the fact that Mississippi could not tax lands sold by the federal government until five years after the date of purchase. *The Statutes at Large of the United States of America* . . . (Boston, 1845-1873; Washington, 1875 —), III, 348-49.

[5] Monroe County, created in 1821, was divided when Lowndes County was organized in 1830.

"One of the most beautiful [rivers] on the continent," said Senator Thomas B. Reed in 1826, was "useless to the inhabitants, or nearly so, from the want of resources in the State to adapt it for the purposes of commerce."[6]

Although the Mississippi and Louisiana legislatures appropriated funds to improve the navigation of the Pearl south of the thirty-first parallel, where the river was the common boundary between the states, the representatives of the old Natchez District had successfully blocked all proposals for state aid to assist steamboat traffic on the river north of the Louisiana border. The merchants of Natchez and Vicksburg feared that the interior trade would be diverted to New Orleans via Lakes Borgne and Ponchatrain and the residents of southwest Mississippi, who paid over two thirds of the state's taxes, were loath to support improvements for the exclusive benefit of other sections of the state.[7]

In 1829 the General Assembly established a Board of Internal Improvements consisting of the governor and three commissioners who represented the western, eastern, and northern sections. Each commissioner conducted a survey of the needs of his district and recommended specific projects to improve the rivers, roads, bridges, and causeways of the state. But the advocates of internal improvements were disappointed in the practical results accomplished. The state failed to negotiate a loan to establish a permanent fund for internal improvements and Commissioners James Green and Abraham Penquote refused to sanction the proposal of Commissioner Charles Lynch of the Eastern District that the state purchase slaves to engage in projects to develop its transportation facilities. In effect, the legislature adopted the recommendation of the majority commissioners that private companies endowed with the privilege of collecting tolls and conducting lotteries should be chartered to undertake the proposed projects. The General Assembly of 1830 declined to extend the life of the Board of Internal Improvements.[8]

East Mississippians inveighed against the failure of the state to initiate a comprehensive program of internal improvements. Their

[6] *Mississippi Session Laws,* 6 Sess. (1822-1823), 93-95; *ibid.,* 7 Sess. (November, 1823), 29-30, 55-57, 71-72; *ibid.,* 9 Sess. (1826), 46-47; *ibid.,* 12 Sess. (1829), 118-20; *ibid.,* 14 Sess. (1831), 81-92; *Register of Debates,* 19 Cong. 2 Sess., 12. For descriptions of Mississippi's roads see Natchez *Ariel,* February 26, March 14, 21, 1829; Natchez *Gazette,* December 21, 1831; John A. Quitman to Eliza Turner Quitman, January 20, February 9, 1828, Quitman Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina; and Joseph Holt Ingraham, *The Southwest by a Yankee,* 2 vols. (New York, 1835), II, 161.

[7] *Mississippi Session Laws,* 6 Sess. (1822-1823), 10-11; *Mississippi House Journal,* 5 Sess. (June, 1822), 121-24; *ibid.,* 7 Sess, (November, 1823), 22-23, 68-69; *ibid.,* 9 Sess. (1826), 130; *ibid.,* 13 Sess. (January, 1830), 144.

[8] *Mississippi Session Laws,* 12 Sess. (1829), 36-38; *Mississippi House Journal,* 12 Sess. (1829), 15; *ibid.,* 13 Sess. (January, 1830), 141-45.

spokesmen in the legislature arraigned the majority commissioners' report as "fettering the energies and industry of the people." The editor of the Monticello *Advocate* complained that the river counties were opposed to "every measure calculated to improve this section of the country that might afford us facilities to make use of the natural outlet, and direct the trade, by improving Pearl river, to N[ew] Orleans."[9]

Frustrated in their campaign to enlist state aid for internal improvements, the advocates of such measures looked hopefully to the federal government. Under the terms of her admission to the Union, Mississippi received three per cent of the proceeds of public land sales within the state for the purpose of internal improvements. But as late as 1828 the state had acquired less than $5,00 from this source. Rather than allocate these funds for insignificant projects that would soon "moulder into decay"—as Governor Brandon expressed it—the state invested the income from the three per cent fund in the stock of the Planters' Bank of Mississippi in 1831.[10]

Many Mississippians urged special land grants by the federal government for internal improvements. In 1829 the General Assembly, directing attention to the fact that the United States had received over $2,500,000 from public land sales in Mississippi but had expended only $56,000 within her borders, requested a grant of land for the purpose of facilitating the navigation of rivers within the state. Mississippi justly merited such consideration, the legislators petitioned, because of "the sparseness of her population, and the limited resources of her territory." Similar requests were made from time to time.[11]

When President Andrew Jackson's Maysville Road veto of 1830 proclaimed his opposition to federal aid for local internal improvements measures, the "Pearl river politicians," according to Edward Turner, were "shocked." But they did not abandon their campaign for assistance from the federal government. In 1833 a legislative committee requested that Congress grant to the state all unsold lands within five miles of the Pearl River to aid in improving its navigation—as a "national object," it was now urged, for the river served as the boundary between Louisiana and Mississippi below the thirty-first parallel.[12] After the introduction of the railroad in the eighteen-thirties, interest in the navigation of the streams subsided, but the sectional dispute over internal improvements continued.

[9] *Mississippi House Journal,* 13 Sess. (January, 1830), 144; Monticello *Pearl River Advocate,* May 7, 1830.

[10] *U. S. Statutes at Large,* III, 348-49, 674-75, IV, 149-50; *Mississippi House Journal,* 7 Sess. (November, 1823), 11; *ibid.,* 11 Sess. (1828), 12-13; *Mississippi Session Laws,* 13 Sess. (January, 1830), 101.

[11] *Mississippi Session Laws,* 12 Sess. (1829), 118-20; *ibid.,* 15 Sess. (1831), 161-68.

[12] Turner to John A. Quitman, July 4, 1830, Claiborne Papers, Jackson; *Mississippi House Journal,* 16 Sess. (January, 1833), 320.

The economic differences between west and east Mississippi also led to a sectional division on banking legislation. Under its revised charter of 1818 the Bank of the State of Mississippi, located at Natchez, had an authorized capital of $3 million and a pledge from the state that it would incorporate no rival institution prior to 1841. During the eighteen-twenties the bank was subjected to sustained criticism: politicians voiced objections to the monopolistic features of its charter; disgruntled applicants accused its directors of favoritism in the granting of loans; and it acquired a reputation for conservative management in a region whose credit demands were constantly expanding. A New England peddler who toured Mississippi in 1826, for example, found the state virtually "drained of money."[13]

The planting and commercial interests of the southwest led the fight for additional banking accommodations. Some urged the creation of a new state bank, despite the charter of the Bank of the State of Mississippi. Others favored the extension of an invitation to the Bank of the United States to establish a branch within the state, a proposal preferred by the directors of the old bank to the establishment of a rival state institution. But if the representatives of the river counties thwarted the internal improvements aspirations of the piney woods, the east Mississippians frustrated temporarily the desires of the old Natchez District for the extension of credit facilities. Residing at a considerable distance from Natchez, they had not benefited from the the operation of the existing bank and were opposed to the creation of new ones.[14]

Beginning in 1828, three successive legislatures rejected resolutions requesting a branch of the national bank. An analysis of the votes in the House of Representatives of 1828 reveals that only the old Natchez District favored a branch bank; a single vote in each of the other areas of settlement was cast for the resolution. At that time the legislators approved a declaration that the location of such a bank in Mississippi "would be inexpedient, impolitic and injurious to the financial resources of the state." But during the next few years the spread of the plantation system into the upper Pearl River region evoked growing demands for credit facilities in that area. In November, 1830, when the General Assembly finally passed a resolution inviting the establishment of a branch bank, every representative from the New Purchase voted for the measure. A branch of the Bank of the United States went into operation at Natchez in 1831.[15]

[13] *Revised Code of the Laws of Mississippi* . . . (Natchez, 1824), 465-72; *Mississippi House Journal,* 4 Sess. (January, 1821), 15; Sparks, *Memories of Fifty Years,* 345; Priscilla Carrington Kline, "New Light on the Yankee Peddler," *New England Quarterly,* XII (1939), 84.

[14] *Mississippi House Journal,* 9 Sess. (1826), 126.

[15] *Mississippi House Journal,* 11 Sess. (1828), 257; *ibid.,* 14 Sess. (November 1830), 39-40; *Mississippi Session Laws,* 11 Sess. (1828), 137; *ibid.,* 14 Sess. (November, 1830), 135-36.

Even before the establishment of the branch bank, the legislature had authorized a new state bank in defiance of the charter granted to the Bank of the State of Mississippi. When the Planters' Bank of Mississippi was incorporated in February, 1830, nine representatives and one senator lodged a vociferous protest, predicting that dire consequences would ensue from the state's violation of its solemn pledge. Although the piney woods lawmakers disapproved of the new bank, a majority of the representatives from the other areas favored the bill. Yet there was considerable opposition from interests in Adams County friendly to the old bank and from those who remonstrated against the provision of the new charter that required the state to subscribe $2 million of the $3 million capital of the new bank, for which purpose bonds were to be sold and the faith of the state pledged for their redemption. In 1831 the Bank of the State of Mississippi was ordered to wind up its affairs; it continued in existence, however, as the Agricultural Bank of Mississippi under a new charter granted in 1833.[16]

One of the most cogent arguments employed by the advocates of new banking facilities was that the state would require augmented credit resources to accommodate a much larger population following the final removal of the Choctaw and Chickasaw Indians. In 1830 Robert J. Walker exulted: "Kentucky's coming, Tennessee's coming, Alabama's coming, Georgia's coming, Carolina's coming, Virginia's coming, and they're all coming to join the joyous crowd of Mississippians, who will bid them welcome to our new domain." During the Adams administration many residents of the state, impatient with the failure of the federal government to expedite the emigration of the Indians, urged that Mississippi emulate Georgia's example by extending her judicial processes over the tribes within her borders. A bill for that purpose was introduced in 1828, but it was not until two years later that Mississippi assumed full legal jurisdiction over the Choctaws and Chickasaws.[17]

When the "Indian Bill" of 1830 was passed, the firmest opposition came from the representatives of the older counties adjoining the Mississippi River.[18] Many inhabitants of the old Natchez District feared that the organization of new counties in the north would futher diminish the role of southwest Mississippi in state politics. Also property owners of the area were apprehensive lest the value of their real

[16] *Mississippi Session Laws,* 13 Sess. (January, 1830), 92-109; *ibid.,* 15 Sess. (1831), 136-38; *ibid.,* 16 Sess. (January, 1833), 151-57; *Mississippi House Journal,* 13 Sess. (January, 1830), 207, 212-13; *Mississippi Senate Journal,* 13 Sess. (January, 1830), 131-32. See Charles Carlisle Alexander, "A History of State Banking in Mississippi" (Master's thesis, University of Mississippi, 1931), 1-8.

[17] Natchez *Gazette,* October 20, 1830; *Mississippi House Journal,* 11 Sess. (1828), 220; *ibid.,* 12 Sess. (1829), 214; *ibid.,* 13 Sess. (January, 1830), 42; *Mississippi Session Laws,* 13 Sess. (January, 1830), 5-6.

[18] In March, 1830, a meeting at Natchez protested the passage of the "Indian Bill." Natchez *Natchez,* April 3, 1830.

estate be depressed when the alluring Choctaw and Chickasaw lands were rendered available for settlement. But even in the river counties there was growing sentiment for the removal of the Indians. The prospect of speculation was tempting, and most of the capital of the state lay in that region.

The people of the piney woods, New Purchase, and Tombigbee settlements manifested more genuine enthusiasm for the removal of the Indians from the areas adjacent to them. Many cast covetous eyes on the bountiful lands inhabited by the redskins; others were prepared to welcome new citizens from other states who would aid in the struggle to terminate the economic and political supremacy long maintained by the old Natchez District. It was generally believed that the plantation system would not develop in northern Mississippi. "This portion of our state," said James F. Trotter in 1831, "must be settled by a hardy, enterprising and industrious yeomanry, who form the bone and sinew of every government."[19]

Some planters of southwest Mississippi, although fearful that the opening of new areas in the state might deflate the value of their lands, discerned that an expansion of the plantation system would enhance the worth of their slaves. Consequently many of them looked with favor upon proposals to restrict the importation of slaves into Mississippi from the older slave states of the Atlantic seaboard. During the eighteen-twenties many Mississippians deprecated the existence of the domestic slave trade; and not all of the antagonism derived from economic considerations. In 1820 Governor David Holmes impugned "this odious practice" on humanitarian grounds. Others alleged that the penitentiaries of Maryland and Virginia were being emptied to furnish the Mississippi slave market. Residents of Natchez protested that the location of a congested slave mart within the city constituted a menace to the health of the community.[20]

Both Governors Holmes and Brandon urged that the Mississippi General Assembly prohibit the introduction of Negroes into the state for the purpose of sale. Legislative bills to bar the domestic slave trade were introduced from time to time during the eighteen-twenties, but all failed of adoption. Warmest support for the disallowance of the trade came from those areas with a preponderant slave population: *i.e.*, the old Natchez District. The representatives of the piney woods and the Pearl River counties opposed the movement almost unanimously. Agitation against the domestic slave trade continued into the next

[19] *Mississippi Senate Journal,* 14 Sess. (November, 1830), 46.

[20] *Mississippi House Journal,* 1 Sess. (1817), 18; *ibid.,* 3 Sess. (1820), 10-11; *Niles' Register,* XXXIII (1827), 211; Natchez *Ariel,* April 11, 1829; Natchez *Natchez,* November 13, 1830.

decade, and the topic was one of major interest at the state constitutional convention of 1832.[21]

In the struggle for political supremacy in Mississippi during the eighteen-twenties there was not complete unanimity within the various sections of the state. Particularly was this true of the old Natchez District, where a number of local rivalries existed. Other counties were jealous of the wealth and prestige of Adams. During the latter part of the decade, Vicksburg, in Warren County, mushroomed into a commercial rival of Natchez.[22] Even within Adams County itself all was not serene, for there existed a strong rural feeling against Natchez. Most of the leadership of the opposition to the political dominance of Adams County came not from other sections of the state, but from near-by Wilkinson County. Indeed the Woodville faction became as formidable as the Natchez clique that it rivaled. In 1833 the governor, one United States senator, one of the two representatives in Congress, and one of the three Supreme Court judges of the state resided in Wilkinson County.

The intrasectional jealousies within the state were clearly evident in the quarrels to select a permanent location for the state capital. During territorial days the "country" party of Adams County secured the removal of the capital from Natchez to the sleepy town of Washington, but the constitutional convention of 1817 restored the seat of government to the former place. After the Choctaw cession of 1820 there were persistent demands that the capital be more centrally located. But the existence of local rivalries outside the old Natchez District made this issue a contentious one. Monticello, in Lawrence County, aspired to be the capital, but a faction in Wayne County, Lawrence's competitor for supremacy in the piney woods, blocked such a proposal. In 1821 the seat of government was moved temporarily to Columbia, in Marion County, where two sessions of the legislature assembled. Then, in December, 1822, the General Assembly met for the first time at Jackson, in Hinds County, a town on the banks of the Pearl only six months old. One Mississippian waggishly suggested that the state politicians should "think strongly of hoisting the seat of government upon wheels—that its removal might be attended with less expense."[23]

During the eighteen-twenties Jackson grew but slowly, and there were repeated attempts to remove the capital from that town. As late as 1830 the House of Representatives voted to make Vicksburg the new seat of government. The constitutional convention of 1832, how-

[21] *Mississippi House Journal,* 3 Sess. (1820), 10-11; *ibid.,* 11 Sess. (1828), 14-15; *ibid.,* 12 Sess. (1829), 228.

[22] Sydnor, *Benjamin L. C. Wailes,* 24-30.

[23] Claiborne, "A Trip Through the Piney Woods," 512; Port Gibson *Correspondent,* June 5, 1823; Natchez *Mississippi State Gazette,* March 9, 1822, quoting Port Gibson *Correspondent.*

ever, designated Jackson as the capital until 1850; thereafter the once languishing town on the banks of the Pearl prospered.[24]

During the eighteen-twenties the political supremacy of Adams County and the old Natchez District was slowly crumbling. In that decade the creation of eleven new counties in other sections of the state weakened the influence of the river counties in the Mississippi General Assembly. In addition, the Adams County delegation in the state House of Representatives was reduced by one member in 1826. That same year the seat of the state Supreme Court, heretofore held at Natchez, was shifted to Monticello. In 1828 the judicial districts of the state were revised to end the dominance of the "river county" lawyers on the dockets of the circuit courts in interior counties.[25]

After 1825 a greater share of the state office-holders and elected officials resided in east Mississippi. The first United States senator from the piney woods was Powhatan Ellis of Wayne County. When he defeated Thomas B. Reed in 1827, he received the votes of every representative and senator from counties east of the Pearl River. Only three legislators representing constituencies outside the old Natchez District voted for Reed.[26]

In 1829 east Mississippi made a determined effort to capture the state's other seat in the United States Senate. Thomas Hill Williams of Natchez, who had been a senator for twelve years, declined to stand for re-election. The most prominent candidates considered by the General Assembly were former Senator Thomas B. Reed of Natchez, who had apparently made ample expiation for his earlier predilection for the Adams administration; George Poindexter of Wilkinson County, Reed's old adversary, not yet fully recovered from a lengthy illness despite his recent statement that "no physical impediment" would hinder him "in discharging the duties of the office"; and state Senator Charles Lynch of Lawrence County. Suspicions concerning Poindexter's health, however, impaired his candidacy and he ultimately withdrew in disgust. Judge Lynch—he was a former probate judge of Lawrence County—was the favorite candidate of east Mississippi and had the support of Powhatan Ellis. The judge was a colorless politician of ordinary talents and but little known outside his own county. One newspaper wit accused Ellis of supporting Lynch because the latter was "a very clever man whose light was so feeble, that you [Ellis] might hope to eclipse him."[27] But there was considerable sentiment that

[24] *Mississippi House Journal,* 13 Sess. (January, 1830), 101; Jackson *Mississippian,* February 28, 1834.

[25] Sydnor, *Benjamin L. C. Wailes,* 74; Rowland, *Courts, Judges and Lawyers of Mississippi,* 76; *Mississippi House Journal,* 11 Sess. (1828), 320-31; *Mississippi Session Laws,* 11 Sess. (1828), 72-75.

[26] *Mississippi House Journal,* 10 Sess. (1827), 33.

[27] Poindexter to M. F. DeGraffenreid, November 17, 1828, in Port Gibson *Correspondent,* November 29, 1828; Poindexter to Abram M. Scott, January 13,

both of Mississippi's senators should not reside east of the Pearl River, and Reed defeated Lynch with little difficulty.

During the late eighteen-twenties there existed in Adams County a clique of politicians attached to the Jackson cause, who formed what J. F. H. Claiborne called the "Natchez Junto." The leading members of this group, who with "their undertrappings and hirelings" sought to control Mississippi politics, were Robert H. Adams, James C. Wilkins, and two brothers, Duncan S. and Robert J. Walker. Although vigorous in their support of Jackson's pretensions to the Presidency, the "Junto" co-operated on local matters with the Adams-and-Clay men of Natchez and vicinity. There were close family connections between the leaders of the two factions. Among the most prominent anti-Jacksonians of Adams County were Adam L. Bingaman, a wealthy planter and brother-in-law of Wilkins, and Stephen Duncan, president of the Bank of the State of Mississippi and a kinsman of the Walkers. As there were no clear-cut controversies between the Mississippi partisans of Jackson and Adams on national issues, it could hardly be expected that there would be a sharp division between the two on state and local questions.[28]

In 1828 the "Junto" sponsored the candidacy of Thomas Hinds for Congress. Wilkins presided at the Natchez meeting that nominated the former leader of the Mississippi Dragoons and Robert J. Walker served on the committee of resolutions. That same year Duncan S. Walker was elected to the lower house of the Mississippi General Assembly after a campaign in which he received the support of followers of Adams as well as Jackson.[29]

In November, 1829, Senator Reed died unexpectedly at Lexington, Kentucky, en route to take up his senatorial duties. As his successor the "Junto" proposed one of its own members, Robert H. Adams. A native of Rockbridge County, Virginia, he had been apprenticed as a youth to learn the cooper's trade. But the young Virginian "began to think of making his living some other way than by making barrels to hold flour and whiskey" and studied law in his leisure hours. He was subsequently admitted to the bar and practiced in Knoxville, Tennessee, before coming to Natchez in 1819. "He is ambitious and he is poor," J. F. H. Claiborne wrote of Adams, "and what is considered instability in him, is the result of these conflicting claims." But all conceded that he was remarkably talented.[30]

1829, in Natchez *Statesman and Gazette*, January 22, 1829; Robert H. Buckner to John A. Quitman, August 9, 1828, Claiborne Papers, Jackson; Woodville *Republican*, June 30, 1829.

[28] Hamilton and Nuermberger, "Claiborne's Memoranda," 142.

[29] Natchez *Statesman and Gazette*, May 29, 1828; Hamilton and Nuermberger, "Claiborne's Memoranda," 142.

[30] Woodville *Republican*, October 16, 1830; Henry S. Foote, *Casket of Reminiscences* (Washington, 1874), 217; Foote, *Bench and Bar*, 25-28; Hamilton and Nuermberger, "Claiborne's Memoranda," 142.

The still infirm George Poindexter also coveted the senatorial seat, but his refusal to appear at Jackson tended to confirm reports that his health would not permit him to discharge the duties of the office. His most vigorous champion in the legislature was J. F. H. Claiborne, a twenty-two year old representative from Adams County who had been elected to office despite the frowns of the "Junto." But Claiborne's enthusiastic championship of Poindexter was of little avail, as Adams gained a sweeping victory in the General Assembly of January, 1830.[31]

The election of Adams to the United States Senate was the last major triumph of the "Junto," and even it was of small consequence; for within six months the new senator followed his predecessor to an early grave. During the eighteen-thirties not a single resident of Adams County was elected to the United States Senate, to the House of Representatives, or to the governorship of the state.[32] The congressional election of 1830 unmistakably revealed the declining power of "Mother Adams" in state politics.

When General Thomas Hinds declined to seek re-election to Congress in 1830, there were many candidates for the vacated seat. One of the aspirants was Franklin E. Plummer of Westville, who had served as representative from Simpson County in the General Assembly since 1827. Few Mississippians outside of his own county had heard of Plummer, and fewer still regarded him as a serious contender in the congressional race. Yet for a brief period he was destined to be one of the most popular political leaders of the state.

Born in Massachusetts about 1805, Plummer had left his native commonwealth for the southwest during the hard times following the panic of 1819. After a brief stay at New Orleans and later in Pearlington, Mississippi, he journeyed to the frontier community of Jackson, when the town was being constructed out of the wilderness in 1822. He later liked to boast that he had driven the wagonload of logs used to build Jackson's first cabin, a claim that other early residents of the capital were inclined to dispute.

Plummer later moved to Westville, a small town on the Pearl River south of Jackson which became the seat of newly organized Simpson County in 1824. Even before he attained majority he was one of the most prominent residents of the county. He served as postmaster of Westville, deputy sheriff, and schoolteacher. After only six weeks' study he was admitted to the bar. A youth of boundless energy, he virtually assumed the duties of sheriff, clerk, and county judge, although the commissions of these offices were held by others.

[31] Poindexter to Claiborne, December 25, 1829, Claiborne, *Life of Quitman*, I, 98-100.

[32] Robert J. Walker, elected United States senator in 1836, and J. F. H. Claiborne, elected representative in 1835, established residences in Madison County just prior to their elections. Jackson *Mississippian*, October 2, 1835.

Plummer's special forte was politics. In 1826, despite charges that he had not yet reached the minimum constitutional age for a legislator, he was chosen as Simpson County's representative in the state General Assembly. In three successive elections he was returned to Jackson virtually without opposition. He quickly became a master of parliamentary procedure who could "embarrass the House or disentangle it, at his pleasure," and he established himself as one of the leaders of east Mississippi in its fight against the river counties. One of the most energetic and popular members of the House, he was narrowly defeated for the speakership in 1830.[33]

General Hinds' decision to retire from Congress in 1830 gave Plummer an opportunity to transfer his talents from the state to the national political arena. But there were many other candidates more highly regarded than the young Simpson County legislator. Other early entrants into the race were David Dickson, runner-up to Hinds in 1828; William L. Sharkey, speaker of the Mississippi House of Representatives; and Richard W. Webber, an attorney of Franklin County. All of these candidates, including Plummer, were avowed advocates of the national administration, although Sharkey was labeled an "eleventh hour Jackson man."[34]

Early in the race the most redoubtable Jackson candidate was Colonel James C. Wilkins, the choice of the Natchez "Junto." But despite the stalwart support of General Hinds, who toured the state with him, Wilkins proved to be a vulnerable target for his opponents. His early association with the Federalist party, his reputed aristocratic tastes, and the increasing unpopularity of Natchez and the "Junto" in the rest of the state seriously hampered his candidacy. Furthermore, it was charged, he derived substantial support from the anti-Jackson forces of the river counties.[35]

John H. Norton of Marion County, former United States marshal, was the last candidate to enter the race and the only acknowledged National Republican. His entry, however, did not please the anti-Jackson leaders. Edward Turner, one of them, urged that "we should throw our strength in the scale of the best Jackson candidate & let the Government go on." The advocates of Wilkins importuned that Norton's entry into the canvass made it imperative that all adherents of Jackson support their candidate, lest a division of the administration

[33] For a more lengthy treatment of Plummer's early career see Edwin A. Miles, "Franklin E. Plummer: Piney Woods Spokesman of the Jackson Era," *Journal of Mississippi History*, XVI (January, 1952), 1-8.

[34] Natchez *Natchez*, June 26, July 10, 1830; William L. Sharkey to John A. Quitman, July 12, 1830, B. W. Edwards to Quitman, July 22, 1830, Claiborne Papers, Jackson.

[35] Natchez *Natchez*, May 22, 1830; John I. Guion to Quitman, August 5, 1830, Claiborne Papers, Jackson; Natchez *Gazette*, July 14, 1830; Monticello *Pearl River Advocate*, July 23, 1830.

forces allow an Adams-and-Clay man to win the race.[36] But the showing of Norton did not justify this alarm.

Plummer directed his most devastating fire at Wilkins. In a circular to the public, he contrasted his own qualifications with those of his wealthy opponent who had fought with Jackson at New Orleans. "I base my prospect of success," he said, "not on wealth, for riches I have none; not on laurels achieved in my country's battles for I have fought no battles, . . . but on the character I have formed during a residence of many years among you."

Wilkins' wealth became a powerful argument against his candidacy. "We are taught," said Plummer, "that the highway to office, distinction and honor, is as free to the *meritorious poor* man, as to the *rich;* to the man who has risen from obscurity by his own individual exertions, as to him who has inherited a high and elevated standing in society, founded on the patrimony of his ancestors."[37] In vain did the followers of Wilkins protest that Plummer was not only exciting local and sectional prejudices, but was also attempting to divide society "into artificial and invidious orders, of rich and poor."[38]

Following the custom of the times, Plummer conducted his campaign during the spring and summer of 1830 by canvassing the state, generally timing his arrival in each county with the opening of the semiannual term of the circuit court. He proved to be a master of stump oratory and his candidacy could no longer be dismissed lightly. "Six weeks before the election," G. H. Holliman of Augusta wrote in August, "Mr. Plummer was hardly spoken of, . . . but he came round two or three weeks before the election, making stump speeches, . . . and in one week after he was here, there was no person spoken of but Mr. Plummer."[39]

The young legislator wisely made no attempt to muster support in the river counties, where he could expect none; instead he fully exploited the prejudices of the Pearl River and piney woods regions against the old Natchez District. The cry of "The People for Plummer and Plummer for the People," first uttered at Monticello on the Fourth of July, became the far-sounding watchword of the campaign. "Sectional feeling," wrote Robert H. Buckner, "is running higher than I have ever known it." In the eastern counties Plummer told the "sovereigns" that he "was the peoples man, that he had fought the battle, through every difficulty, in our State legislature in their behalf, that he was opposed in every point by the members from the Mississippi." "Plummer is very formidable," John A. Quitman conceded

[36] Turner to Quitman, July 4, 1830, Claiborne Papers, Jackson; Natchez *Natchez,* August 14, 1830.
[37] Woodville *Republican,* June 26, 1830.
[38] *Ibid.,* July 17, 1830.
[39] Claiborne, *Mississippi,* 425; Holliman to Quitman, August 12, 1830, Claiborne Papers, Jackson.

early in June. "Plummer will be hard to beat," another political observer predicted a few days later.[40]

The election, held on August 12 and 13, resulted in an impressive victory for the representative from Simpson County. Out of 11,000 votes cast, Plummer received approximately 35 per cent. Dickson trailed by almost 1,500 votes and Wilkins, the principal target of all the candidates, ran third. Norton, Sharkey, and Webber followed in that order. It was a victory for east Mississippi over the river counties. Plummer, as expected, gathered few ballots in the counties adjoining the Mississippi; in Adams County, for example, he polled only eleven votes—less than 2 per cent. But in the piney woods and the Pearl River regions he won decisive majorities in seven counties and pluralities in four others.[41]

By 1830 the piney woods and Pearl River regions could control the politics of the state by acting in concert. Yet their supremacy was short-lived, for during the next few years different sectional patterns developed within Mississippi. The plantation system, once confined largely to the southwest, expanded into the upper Mississippi and Pearl River regions, begetting a closer harmony between those areas and the old Natchez District. There was also considerable mass emigration from older sections of the state as well as from other parts of the Union into northern Mississippi following the removal of the Indians during the early eighteen-thirties. (Of Wayne County, J. F. H. Claiborne wrote in 1841: "The treaty of 1830 with the Choctaws, that threw open such an immense extent of productive territory in the center of our State, drew off her population by the hundreds.")[42] Although there were over two and one-half times as many white persons in Mississippi in 1840 as there had been ten years earlier, thirteen counties of the older regions suffered an actual decline in that respect. By 1840 over one half of the white population resided in counties that had not even existed ten years earlier, resulting in a shift of the political balance of power to the north.

But in 1830 east Mississippi was at the zenith of its power and rejoiced in its overwhelming victory at the polls. "The East now dates political birth," boasted a resident of Pike County, "having an equal number in the U. S. Senate, and the only representative in Congress: It awakens our surprise to see how long it has bowed to the Aristocracy of the West, and been tolled by the knell of imaginary authority."[43]

[40] Natchez *Natchez*, July 31, 1830; Buckner to Quitman, June 15, 1830, Holliman to Quitman, August 12, 1830, Claiborne Papers, Jackson; Quitman to Eliza Turner Quitman, June 6, 1830, Quitman Papers.

[41] Secretary of State Archives, Series F, No. 33, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

[42] Claiborne, "A Trip Through the Piney Woods," 529.

[43] Woodville *Mississippi Democrat*, February 5, 1831.

CHAPTER III

WHOLE HOGS, HALF HOGS, AND ARISTOCRATS

> "We will give you a constitution . . . much more *democratic* than any other in the U. S. Not *republican*—but down right and absolute *democracy*."
>
> Stephen Duncan[1]

Mississippi's first state constitution, drafted in 1817 by a convention at Washington, the territorial capital, was less liberal than most constitutions of the new states. Restrictive property qualifications existed for the governor and members of the state legislature. A representative in the lower house of the General Assembly, for example, was required to possess 150 acres or real estate valued at $500. Similar prerequisites for state senator and governor were set at twice and four times that amount respectively. In addition, the suffrage was limited to free white males who paid taxes or served in the militia and the apportionment of representation in the Senate was based on free white taxable inhabitants. Another conservative feature was the provision that all state judges hold office during good behavior. Most subordinate state officials were also chosen by the General Assembly rather than by the electorate.[2]

The conservative nature of the state's first constitution may be partly attributable to the influence of the river counties at the Washington convention. Twenty-four of the forty-seven delegates represented the five counties adjoining the Mississippi, and eight others were from the interior counties of the old Natchez District. Almost all prominent political figures in the territory were present: three future representatives in Congress; three men who were subsequently elected to the United States Senate; and the first five governors of the state. Indeed, every chief executive who served under the constitution was a member of the convention which drew up the document. Easily the most conspicuous delegate was George Poindexter, chairman of the committee appointed to draft a frame of government. An authorized

[1] Duncan to Levin Wailes, September 14, 1832, Benjamin L. C. Wailes Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

[2] Francis Newton Thorpe, *The Federal and State Constitutions, Colonial Charters, and Other Organic Laws of the States, Territories and Colonies Now or Heretofore Forming the United States of America,* 7 vols. (Washington, 1909), 2032-48; see also Dunbar Rowland, "Mississippi's First Constitution and Its Makers," *Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society,* VI (1902), 79-90; and Winbourne Magruder Drake, "Mississippi's First Constitutional Convention," *Journal of Mississippi History,* XVIII (April, 1956), 79-110.

biographer wrote in 1835 that the constitution of the Washington convention was "shaped almost entirely by the hand of Mr. Poindexter."[3]

The sectional line-up at the 1817 convention was pronounced. No delegate from the counties east of the Pearl River favored the apportionment of senators based on free white taxable inhabitants or the adoption of judicial tenure during good behavior. In addition, the representatives of east Mississippi were able to block even more conservative measures favored by some western delegates, including a proposal to compensate owners of slaves executed by the state, a plan to establish the federal ratio for apportionment in the lower house of the General Assembly, a motion to require *viva voce* elections, and a resolution to give the executive more extensive appointing power.[4]

The constitution of 1817 made no provision for its amendment except by the summoning of a new convention. With the approval of two-thirds of both houses, the General Assembly was empowered to recommend a convention to the voters at the ensuing general election. If a majority of those voting for state representative also favored the calling of a convention, the legislature was then required to summon such a body, with each county having as many delegates as it had members in the General Assembly.

As east Mississippi gained political strength during the eighteen-twenties, a movement for a new convention to liberalize the constitution was launched. In January, 1825, a bill for that purpose was introduced in the House of Representatives, but it failed to win the required two-thirds majority. In the following sessions similar proposals met with the same fate. Throughout the decade the river counties were able to ward off the demands for a convention. In 1829 twelve of the sixteen members of the House of Representatives who opposed such a measure represented counties bordering on the Mississippi or within the old Natchez District. The arguments employed by the opponents of a new constitutional convention were many: the expense of such a body; the inadvisability of altering the frame of government "on light and frivilous occasions"; but most of all the representatives of west Mississippi feared a further dwindling of their power in state politics.[5]

[3] *Biographical Sketch of the Honorable George Poindexter, Senator in Congress from Mississippi* (Washington, 1835), 6. Walter Leake, David Holmes, and Poindexter were subsequently elected senator; Poindexter, Christopher Rankin, and David Dickson became representatives in Congress; the first five governors were Holmes, Poindexter, Leake, Gerard C. Brandon, and Abram M. Scott.

[4] *Journal of the Convention of the Western Part of the Mississippi Territory, Begun and Held at the Town of Washington, on the Seventh Day of July, 1817* (Port Gibson, 1831), 31, 33-34, 53, 60, 70-71, 81, 96-97.

[5] *Mississippi House Journal,* 8 Sess. (1825), 96; *ibid.,* 10 Sess. (1827), 173-74; *ibid.,* 11 Sess. (1828), 269-70; *ibid.,* 12 Sess. (1829), 214-15; Mississippi Senate *Journal,* 14 Sess. (November, 1830), 49.

By 1830, however, Mississippi had almost outgrown her first constitution and it was apparent that the agitation for a new convention could not long be allayed. Indeed, it was becoming patently difficult to respect certain provisions of the constitution of 1817 without violating others. For example, one article permitted only 35 representatives in the lower house of the General Assembly until there were 80,000 white inhabitants in the state; yet another provided that there should be at least one representative for each county. In 1830 there were 26 counties within the state and their number would soon be doubled by the organization of the impending Choctaw and Chickasaw cessions, but the population was only 70,000 white inhabitants. In addition, the constitution restricted the number of circuit court districts to eight. With the new territory to be served, an onerous burden would be borne by the Superior Court judges, who also comprised the personnel of the Supreme Court. Obviously either a separate supreme court would have to be established or the number of circuit court districts increased.[6]

With the imminent prospect of thirty new counties to be organized in north Mississippi, the hostility of the river counties to an immediate convention was appreciably lessened. Indeed, after 1830 the old Natchez District, whose leaders realized that it would be to their advantage to hold a convention before their voice in state politics was even further reduced, produced many new champions of constitutional reform. In October, 1830, both Robert J. Walker, a leading member of the Natchez "Junto," and Chancellor John A. Quitman, who had opposed a convention in the General Assembly of 1828, pledged their support to the movement. For once east and west Mississippi were prompted to concerted action and the greatest opposition to a convention came from the Tombigbee area, whose legislators perceived that their interests would be similar to those who would inhabit the neighboring Chickasaw and Choctaw lands. But in November, 1830, despite the earnest protestations of state Senator James F. Trotter of Lowndes, who urged that a revision of the constitution be deferred until after the organization of the new counties, the General Assembly overwhelmingly adopted a bill recommending a convention to the voters. In August, 1831, the electorate by a four-to-one majority approved the legislative recommendation. Only the Tombigbee counties of Monroe and Lowndes and the piney woods counties of Hancock, Jackson, and Wayne opposed the proposal. Accordingly, in December, 1831, the General Assembly issued a call for the election of delegates in August, 1832, with the convention to meet the following month.[7]

[6] See speech of Robert J. Walker in Natchez *Gazette,* October 20, 1830.

[7] *Ibid.;* Claiborne, *Life of Quitman,* I, 100-01; *Mississippi Senate Journal,* 14 Sess. (November, 1830), 44-49; *ibid.,* 15 Sess. (1831), 22; *Mississippi House Journal,* 14 Sess. (November, 1830), 56; *Mississippi Session Laws,* 14 Sess. (November, 1830), 38-39, 131-32; *ibid.,* 15 Sess. (1831), 95-103.

By early spring the campaign for delegates was well under way. Some conservatives, including United States Senator George Poindexter, proposed that the delegates should go to the convention unpledged, but such suggestions went unheeded. On some issues almost all candidates were in accord. Most, for example, favored biennial rather than annual sessions of the General Assembly, as required by the constitution of 1817. In 1829 Franklin E. Plummer had taken exception to the policy of convening the legislators every year. Annual sessions, he said, "answered no other purpose than convulsing the state in innumerable difficulties, organizing factions—creating party spirit and private animosities about senatorial and other questions, ruinous in the extreme, to the good order of society." Russell M. Williamson of Madison County also remonstrated against "the rage for *law-making* and *law-mending*—the consequent complexity of our statutes —the difficulty to acquaint the body of the people with all the acts of repeated legislation, to say nothing of the additional expense incident to annual sessions."[8]

There was also a prevailing inclination among the candidates for delegates to separate the supreme court from the circuit court system. Likewise most assailed the practice of judicial tenure during good behavior—"a relick of the political system of Great Britain," according to Henry S. Foote. But there was a wide divergence of opinion on the question of the election of judges. The so-called "aristocrats," led by Chancellor John A. Quitman, favored a retention of the election of all judicial officials by the General Assembly or by gubernatorial nomination subject to the approval of the Senate. They objected vigorously to the "very mischievous and dangerous" doctrine of elective judges advanced by some Mississippians during the campaign for delegates. Quitman declared that the popular election of judges "would be dangerous to the extreme, would tend to corruption, and strike a fatal blow at the independency of the judiciary." Aloysius M. Keegan, of Lawrence County, declined to advocate "a measure, the wisdom of ages, has said was unprofitable." "I do not fear the People," said Keegan. "I fear an electioneering Judge." Quitman, Keegan and others pointed to the example of the other states, in none of which were supreme court judges elected by the people.[9]

Some candidates for the convention, realizing that some concession must be made to the demands for popular election of the judiciary, advocated the election of circuit court judges and the continued appoint-

[8] Vicksburg *Advocate and Register*, March 12, 1832; Natchez *Ariel*, July 25, 1829; Natchez *Gazette*, April 20, 1832.

[9] Vicksburg *Mississippian*, April 2, 1832; Claiborne, *Life of Quitman*, I, 117; Natchez *Natchez*, May 25, July 20, 1832. Despite his opposition to the principle of a popularly elected judiciary, Keegan expressed a willingness to accept instructions from his constituents and in the convention voted with the advocates of that mode of election.

ment of supreme court judges. This faction, dubbed the "half hogs," included within its ranks former Governor Gerard C. Brandon, but it had little numerical strength.[10]

The "whole hogs," as their opponents called them, upheld the election of all judges by the people. Henry S. Foote, a candidate for delegate from the senatorial district of Warren and Washington counties, was their most eloquent spokesman, championing the cause through the columns of the Vicksburg *Mississippian,* which he edited in partnership with his brother-in-law Reuben P. Catlett. In a series of articles from January 9 to April 2, Foote propounded his faith *"in the competency of the people to govern themselves"* and urged the *"election of all important public officers* by direct popular agency." Foote himself was not elected to the convention but was defeated by a candidate who belatedly endorsed the same views. Likewise a majority of those elected as delegates were committed to the election of judges by the people. Judge Harry Cage regretted that in most counties "those in favour of an independent judiciary seem to retire from the Contest & seem disinclined to risk their popularity upon the question."[11]

The convention met in the Hall of Representatives at Jackson on September 10, 1832, and remained in session for over six weeks. In comparison with that of the convention of 1817 its personnel was not distinguished. Among the delegates were twenty-four lawyers, sixteen planters, and eight doctors. The president of the assembly was P. Rutilius R. Pray of Hancock County, a "plain but dignified and sensible man" who combined "much self possession with a tolerable knowledge of parliamentary duties." Only one half of the forty-eight members of the convention had ever served in the Mississippi General Assembly.[12]

Quitman noted "the many young and inexperienced men, we have in this body, [which] gives rise to extravagant & wild schemes." But he also observed that "there is a formidable array of men of intelligence in the Convention," none of whom was more prominent than the chancellor himself. Also present was former Governor Brandon, one of the five delegates who had also attended the 1817 convention. Brandon, however, played a less important role than might have been expected and resigned shortly before the adjournment of the convention. John Black, justice of the Supreme Court and soon to be elected to the United States Senate, James F. Trotter, who subsequently held those same

[10] Woodville *Southern Planter,* July 25, 1832.

[11] Vicksburg *Mississippian,* January 9, 1832; Cage to John A. Quitman, May 1, 1832, Claiborne Papers, Jackson. The terms "aristocrat," "half hog," and "whole hog" were used by Stephen Duncan, a delegate from Adams County, in a letter to Levin Wailes, September 14, 1832, Wailes Papers.

[12] Natchez *Natchez,* September 28, 1832; Vicksburg *Advocate and Register,* September 13, 1832. See Winbourne Magruder Drake, "The Mississippi Constitutional Convention of 1832," *Journal of Southern History,* XXIII (August, 1957), 354-70.

two positions, and Daniel W. Wright, later a judge of the High Court of Errors and Appeals, also served as delegates. But the "many young and inexperienced men" far outnumbered the "men of intelligence," and, for the most part, their views prevailed. One "aristocrat" lamented: "Those who possess least ability to instruct are ever foremost in debate."[13]

Most of the work of the convention was accomplished in committees assigned to study the various articles of the old constitution and make recommendations for revision. Nathan G. Howard of Rankin, Gerard C. Brandon of Wilkinson, Cicero Jefferson of Jefferson, John A. Quitman of Adams, and James F. Trotter of Lowndes, were chairmen of the committees on the declaration of rights, the legislative department, the judicial department, and general provisions respectively. After the reports had been submitted and discussed, new committees were selected to prepare the resolutions of each article for the consideration of the full assembly. On October 24 Chancellor Quitman was chosen chairman of a committee to arrange the several portions of the proposed constitution in proper form for the final action of the body. Two days later the convention adopted the new constitution by a vote of thirty-six to ten.[14]

There was little debate concerning the recommendations of Chairman Howard's committee on the declaration of rights. The phraseology of the declaration adopted by the 1832 convention was almost identical to that of the 1817 convention with the exception of two new sections: one forbidding property qualifications for office and suffrage, and another prohibiting the election of officials for life or during good behavior. Most of the delegates were already committed to these changes and they elicited slight interest on the floor.[15]

Several changes were effected in the article on the legislative department. Of little constitutional significance were some of them, such as the adoption of the term "Legislature" for the old "General Assembly," the raising of the minimum age for state senators and the lowering of the same for representatives, the designation of Jackson as the permanent capital until 1850, the requirement of state officials to reside at the seat of government, and the holding of state elections in November rather than August. The advocates of biennial rather than annual sessions of the legislature were successful. In keeping with the spirit of the new declaration of rights, property qualifications for legislators and electors were abolished.[16]

[13] Quitman to Eliza Turner Quitman, September 12, 16, 1832, Quitman Papers; Vicksburg *Advocate and Register,* September 20, 1832.

[14] *Journal of the Convention of the State of Mississippi Held in the Town of Jackson* (Jackson, 1832), 249-53, 281, 299.

[15] *Ibid.,* 19; Thorpe, *Constitutions,* IV, 2049-51.

[16] *Journal of Convention* (1832), 20-21; Thorpe, *Constitutions,* IV, 2051-55.

The same spirit made mandatory alterations in the article on the executive department. The governor's property qualification was eliminated. The nominating power of the legislature was drastically curtailed by a provision that made several subordinate executive officials, including the secretary of state, treasurer, auditor, and attorney general, elective rather than appointive. The advocates of "rotation in office" inserted a proviso that permitted the same governor to hold office only four years out of any six. The office of lieutenant governor was abolished; henceforth the president of the Senate was designated to assume the duties of the governor in case of a vacancy in that office.[17]

There were also several fundamental changes in the article entitled "General Provisions." Ministers of the gospel were no longer barred from holding state offices as they had been under the earlier constitution. Henceforth divorce decrees granted by the Chancery Court did not require legislative approval. One section, sponsored by Quitman, which forbade the borrowing of money on the credit of the state without the approval of two successive legislatures, took on new significance later in the decade. Another provision, which prohibited the importation of slaves into the state for the purpose of sale after May 1, 1833, also led to prolonged litigation settled only by a United States Supreme Court decision.[18]

The most lively controversy in the convention, as in the campaign for delegates, centered around the proposals concerning the judiciary department. Chairman Quitman voted with the minority on the judiciary committee, so the majority report of that body was prepared by Eugene Magee of Warren County. Quitman and Thomas P. Falconer of Wayne County later submitted a minority report. Both statements advocated a separation of the supreme and circuit court systems and a limited tenure for the judiciary. But while Magee's report favored the election of both circuit and supreme court judges by the people, the minority report recommended the appointment of the former by the governor with the approval of the representatives from the counties in each district, and the nomination of the latter by the executive subject to confirmation by the Senate. The tall, slender Quitman, noted for his "affability, kindness, and courtesy" (he was "quite a Van Buren in manners," according to Mrs. Anne Royall), labored indefatigably for his views; during the course of the convention he lost approximately twenty pounds and his countenance took on a yellowish hue. But all in vain. He wrote early during the session that "the complexion of the members of the Convention is decidedly in favor of what they call *Reform*—but which in my opinion is only one step removed from the rule

[17] *Journal of Convention* (1832), 25; Thorpe, *Constitutions*, IV, 2057-59.
[18] *Journal of Convention* (1832), 52-55; Thorpe, *Constitutions*, IV, 2060-62. *Groves v. Slaughter*. 15 Peters 449 (1842).

and dominion of lawless force and violence." He regarded his position as chairman of the judiciary committee as "the most responsible and conspicuous station next to that of President," but he was keenly disappointed that "I am there compelled to hear a great deal of absurdity." He feared "very much upon the whole our labours will result in great injury to the state."[19]

Quitman and the "aristocrats" never relinquished their fight against the "whole hogs." But they found it "an uphill business to address with arguments or persuasions a set of men who have prejudged the cause, and have pledged themselves to vote accordingly." Two days before adjournment a proposal by Nathan G. Howard for legislative election of judges was defeated by a vote of twenty-six to nineteen. A substitute calling for nomination by the governor fared even worse. Ten opponents of the popular election of judges opposed the adoption of the constitution.[20]

There was no clear-cut sectional alignment evident in the voting on the question of popularly elected judges. The most uniform support for the doctrine came from the Pearl River region, but the delegates from the old Natchez District also favored the proposal. The representatives of the piney woods and the Tombigbee counties were almost evenly divided.[21]

Nor was there any partisan division on the issue. Of the twenty-one delegates who were professed advocates of the regularly nominated Democratic-Republican presidential ticket, Jackson and Van Buren, fourteen espoused, while seven opposed the popular election of judges. Among the seven Democratic "aristocrats," however, were such recognized Jacksonian leaders as John Black, Daniel W. Wright, Nathan G. Howard, and James F. Trotter.[22]

In his valedictory to the delegates, President Pray congratulated them for enlarging "the duties and liberties of the people" and for extending "the bounds of legitimate democracy." He predicted that "our labors will form a proud era in the history of Mississippi, and we may justly anticipate that, though we are among the youngest members of the confederacy, we shall ere long be followed by those of more mature years." Equally enthusiastic was Governor Abram M. Scott, who com-

[19] *Journal of Convention* (1832), 52-55, 66-68; Sparks, *Memories of Fifty Years*, 343; Anne Newport Royall, *Mrs. Royall's Southern Tour, or, Second Series of the Black Book*, 3 vols. (Washington, 1830-1831), III, 105-06; Quitman to Eliza Turner Quitman, September 16, October 2, 1832, Quitman Papers.

[20] Quitman to Eliza Turner Quitman, September 23, 1832, Quitman Papers; *Journal of Convention* (1832), 283, 299.

[21] *Journal of Convention* (1832), 283.

[22] In October, twenty-one members of the convention attended a meeting in the Capitol to endorse the Jackson-Van Buren ticket. Natchez *Gazette*, October 31, 1832.

plimented the convention for acting "with a fearlessness of consequence and in a spirit of reform, characteristic of the age in which we live."[23]

The constitution of 1832 was never submitted to the electorate, possibly because, as opponents charged, "it was feared that the people would reject it." Paradoxically the most vigorous advocates of "popular rights" at the convention opposed popular ratification of the document. On the other hand, the so-called "aristocrats" favored its submission to the voters; Quitman considered the convention's refusal to do so "one of the greatest outrages ever committed on a free people."[24]

The new constitution remedied one of the basic defects of the old by establishing a mode of amendment. An amendment could be proposed by a two-thirds vote in both houses of the legislature. It was then to be submitted to the electorate at the next general election. If approved by a majority of those voting for members of the state House of Representatives at that time, it became part of the constitution. Actually this procedure led to little flexibility; in time it was denounced as "wholly inefficient" and "complex and impractical." Prior to 1861 only six amendments were added to the basic law of 1832. Curiously enough, the new constitution, unlike its predecessor, made no provision for the summoning of a future constitutional convention. Perhaps, as Quitman observed, the delegates considered "themselves capable of legislating for all posterity."[25]

In some respects the constitution of 1832 proved to be a disappointment even to its advocates. The provision inaugurating biennial sessions of the legislature was of little consequence during the first ten years of its operation. "We do not more than half like these biennial sessions," said one Mississippian in November, 1833. "Mississippi is a young and growing State; and has much of her territory still unoccupied, which, however, in the course of five years, will be filling up, and will require annual Legislative action."[26] This observation was prophetic: during the period from 1833 to 1842 the legislature convened for no less than eleven regular, special, or adjourned sessions.

To carry out the spirit of the constitution it was necessary for the legislature to pass supplementary statutes; and in many cases this action was not immediately forthcoming. It was not until 1839 that the old semi-barbaric penal code was supplanted nor until 1846 that a system of "common schools" was established.[27]

[23] *Journal of Convention* (1832), 303; *Mississippi House Journal,* 16 Sess. (January, 1832), 12.

[24] Natchez *Courier,* August 9, 1833; Quitman to Eliza Turner Quitman, October 18, 1832, Quitman Papers.

[25] Thorpe, *Constitutions,* IV, 2062-65; *Mississippi House Journal* (January, 1837), 52; Natchez *Courier and Journal,* June 14, 1837; Quitman to Eliza Turner Quitman, September 16, 1832, Quitman Papers.

[26] Natchez *Courier,* November 22, 1833.

[27] *Mississippi Session Laws* (1839), 102-94; *ibid.* (1846), 98-104.

Not only were recommendations of the constitution disregarded, but in some instances its articles were flagrantly violated. From 1833 to 1837 the legislature sanctioned the interstate traffic in slaves, despite the constitutional prohibition, by levying a 2½ per cent tax upon all such sales. In 1838, the provisions of the supplementary charter of the Union Bank of Mississippi, permitting the sale of bonds on the credit of the state, were carried into effect, despite the fact that the constitution required the sanction of two successive legislatures in such cases. Within a few years, however, the state repented its constitutional indiscretion, and, in atonement, repudiated bonds worth $5 million. One Mississippian later interpreted the shift of the state's constitutional position as follows: *"She misunderstood her own domestic rules and regulations in such matters, when she contracted the liability, but understands them perfectly, and is sure she is right, when she refuses to pay them."*[28]

By far the most significant feature of the new constitution was the provision that all judicial personnel, as well as virtually all other state and local officers, be chosen by popular election. Not only were the justices of the High Court of Errors and Appeals, the chancellor, and circuit court judges to be elected by the people for periods of limited tenure, but the old county courts, whose members had been appointed by the General Assembly, were supplanted by democratically chosen boards of police.

Opponents of the popular election of judges predicted dire consequences from the convention's action. "Our main-sheet anchor is gone," bewailed one correspondent of the Natchez *Courier*. James K. Cook, editor of the *Natchez*, regarded the new constitution as "an additional stride towards the establishment of *pure democratic institutions*, which cannot but excite in every American citizen, feelings both of hope and of fear—of hope that the experiment may ultimately be successful; and of fear, that it is an advance of *one* step too far beyond those limits, within which there is known to be safety." George Winchester, a former Supreme Court judge, declared that "our constitution is the subject of ridicule in all the States where it is known. It is referred to as a full definition of mobocracy."[29]

There were numerous complaints that the increased number of popularly chosen officials resulted in too many elections. Winchester regretted "the frequency with which our new constitution calls the people from their occupations and employments, to elect so numerous a body of officers." In 1840 Governor Alexander G. McNutt expressed a similar view: "The frequency of elections are very burthensome on the people, calling them continually from their usual avocations, and causing

[28] *Ibid.*, 17 Sess. (November, 1833), 49; *ibid.*, (1838), 9-44; [Dudley S. Jennings], *Nine Years of Democratic Rule in Mississippi* (Jackson, 1847), 76.

[29] Natchez *Courier*, August 2, September 27, 1833; Natchez *Natchez*, November 9, 1832.

the excitement of the canvass for office to be almost perpetual." "I do not think I err materially," wrote a correspondent of the Columbus *Democrat* in 1841, "when I assert that in this State we have too much Democracy."[30]

Nevertheless in time even the most diehard opponents of the constitution became reconciled to it. The fears of the "aristocrats" that under the doctrine of the popular election of the judiciary incompetent and radical personnel would preside on the state benches were unwarranted. The quality of the new judiciary was equal if not superior to that of the old. Two of the three judges elected to the High Court of Errors and Appeals in 1833 had been members of the old Supreme and Superior Court; similarly one of the four new circuit judges had served in that capacity. John A. Quitman was re-elected chancellor by the people without opposition.

The conservative nature of the newly elected judges was evidenced by the fact that Chancellor Quitman and Justices William L. Sharkey and Cotesworth Pinckney Smith of the High Court of Errors and Appeals were all acknowledged leaders of the Calhoun faction in Mississippi. The third justice of the High Court, Daniel W. Wright, had opposed the mode of election by which he secured his position. Two of the circuit court judges, Aloysius M. Keegan and James F. Trotter, likewise had been delegates to the convention hostile to the program of the "whole hogs."

With the judiciary in safe, conservative hands serious opposition to the popular election of judges melted away. By 1845 John A. Quitman was willing to write that "candor compels me to say that I now regard it as the best mode of selecting judicial officers." Governor Albert Gallatin Brown's pride in boasting—as he did in 1846—that Mississippi "was first to elect judges by the people" was shared by most citizens of the state.[31]

The constitution of 1832 served as Mississippi's basic frame of government until Reconstruction. In adopting it, the state enacted one of the most democratic constitutions of the nation—"imperfect indeed, but the freest in the world," according to J. F. H. Claiborne. Citizens of no other state possessed greater rights of participation in the operation of their government. The sentiment of Mississippians was succinctly expressed by a legislative committee in 1833: "If it be urged that the people are incompetent to judge, our answer is, that so are we."[32]

[30] Natchez *Courier,* September 20, 1833; *Mississippi House Journal* (1840), 15; Columbus *Democrat,* January 9, 1841.

[31] Claiborne, *Life of Quitman,* I, 127; *Mississippi House Journal* (1846), 195.

[32] Natchez *Mississippi Free Trader,* August 11, 1835; *Mississippi House Journal,* 17 Sess. (November, 1833), 153.

CHAPTER IV

A SENATOR OF LOFTY BEARING

"If . . . Mississippi desire[d] to be represented in the national legislature by a mere machine, to be wielded by the arm of power, they made an unfortunate selection in me."

George Poindexter[1]

On July 2, 1830, after a brief illness, Senator Robert H. Adams of Mississippi died at his home near Natchez. He had returned only a few days earlier after attending his first session of Congress and was suddenly taken ill. Some of his friends attributed his death to incautious drinking practices during a period of rapidly changing temperature. "What a loss to his country & to his family!" lamented Edward Turner. "What a solemn warning to ice punch drinkers—to rash, & heedless men!"[2]

The office of United States senator from Mississippi appeared to be a fatal one. In less than a year, Thomas B. Reed, only forty-two years old, and Adams, four years younger, had both succumbed to sudden violent illnesses. The man whom Governor Gerard C. Brandon chose to fill the vacancy was George Poindexter, now fifty-one, older and apparently in feebler health than either of his predecessors had been at the time of their election.

Born in Louisa County, Virginia, in 1779, Poindexter had arrived in Natchez in 1802 "without friends or introduction, and with no resources other than the cash in his pocket and a shining faith in his own ability." Yet within twenty years he had held almost every major political office within the power of the citizens of Mississippi to bestow. During territorial days he had served as legislator, attorney general, delegate to Congress, and delegate to the constitutional convention of 1817. Since statehood he had been representative in Congress and governor. "The history of his career," J. F. H. Claiborne later wrote, "is, in fact, the history of the Territory and the State, so closely and prominently was he connected with everything that occurred."[3]

During his meteoric career Poindexter, "whose words fell on his adversaries in debate with a force difficult to be resisted, and with an effect as pointed as needles," acquired a host of personal enemies who in

[1] Poindexter to editor of Raymond *Patriot,* March 31, 1832, in Natchez *Gazette,* May 11, 1832.

[2] Turner to John A. Quitman, July 4, 1830, Claiborne Papers, Jackson.

[3] Mack Swearingen, *The Early Life of George Poindexter; a Story of the First Southwest* (New Orleans, 1934), 28; Claiborne, *Mississippi,* 361.

turn brought many charges against his character. It was alleged that he had killed an antagonist in a duel by firing prematurely; that he had cowardly fled from the battlefield at New Orleans; and that he had falsely accused his wife of infidelity when he divorced her in 1815. His foes also cited his proclivity for gambling, drinking, and other forms of dissipation. But even his enemies acknowledged that he was a man of extraordinary talents. One of them, Martin Van Buren, felt that he was "endowed with abilities, which were in my judgment, far superior to those which even his friends conceded to him." The Reverend William Winans expressed the opinion that Poindexter would have been "one of the greatest men I ever knew had moral principles exercised control over his actions."[4]

For several years prior to 1830 Poindexter suffered from a severe infirmity, once described as rheumatism aggravated "by the unskillful administration of medicine by his family physician." This malady prevented him from walking without assistance and for a time he was unable even to sit up in bed. Despite his disability, he still earnestly sought one political honor yet withheld from him—a seat in the United States Senate. When the two previous vacancies had occurred, he did not conceal his profound disappointment when the General Assembly had disregarded his qualifications. On the second such occasion he had declined to appear in Jackson to verify reports that his health was much improved. Assuming a lofty attitude, he maintained that his presence in the capital "would manifest a mean solicitude for office." "There can be no mistake about the state of my health," he asserted. "If I am worthy of the high trust of senator in Congress, I certainly may be trusted to tell the truth as to the state of my health."[5]

Poindexter was in Louisville, Kentucky, when he received news of his appointment as United States Senator. Many Mississippians still doubted his ability to carry out the duties of the office. John A. Quitman, for example, had heard that he was still "unable to stand or move." But from Kentucky Poindexter and his friends dispatched encouraging intelligence of his apparent recovery. Such accounts were undoubtedly exaggerated for when he entered the Senate in December, 1830, he was carried to his seat in the arms of a servant. The Mississippi legislature, however, had already chosen him to serve Adams' unexpired term. "The victory was most compleet," Governor Brandon jubilantly wrote. Only six votes had been cast in opposition.[6]

[4] *Biographical Sketch of Poindexter,* 28; Swearingen, *Poindexter, passim.;* John C. Fitzpatrick (ed.), *The Autobiography of Martin Van Buren* in *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1918,* Vol. II (Washington, 1920), 745; Percy Lee Rainwater (ed.), "Notes on Southern Personalities," *Journal of Southern History,* IV (May, 1938), 226.

[5] *Biographical Sketch of Poindexter,* 8; Natchez *Gazette,* November 3, 1830; Poindexter to Claiborne, December 25, 1829, in Claiborne, *Life of Quitman,* I, 98-99.

[6] Quitman to J. F. H. Claiborne, October 25, 1830, in Claiborne, *Life of Quit-*

In forwarding the new senator's commission, Secretary of State John A. Grimball expressed gratification that President Jackson would "find an advocate, in him, who in 1819, so ably defended his conduct, in relation to the seminole war." Poindexter's constituents, like Grimball, expected him to support the administration. When the British had threatened New Orleans, he had offered his services to Jackson, seeking "no compensation,—no rank," and had served as military aide to General William Carroll. During the Seminole debate he had assured the Old Hero of "the feeble aid, which my best exertions can afford you." His defense of Jackson in the House of Representatives was regarded as one of the most eloquent speeches on the subject "and the national verdict then was that his arguments were unanswerable."[7]

But Poindexter's enemies—and they were many—repeatedly cautioned Jackson that his public defender was not to be trusted. Once, it was alleged, he had abused the general in language ordinarily employed to describe a common pickpocket. Poindexter himself warned Jackson of efforts that "have been made to excite in your mind, prejudice against me." Despite such caveats, William B. Lewis, in planning the strategy for Jackson's presidential campaign, assured Poindexter in 1822 that the friends of the Hero knew of "no one in your State on whom they can rely with more confidence than yourself." Yet the Mississippian's enemies continued to send disturbing reports to the Hermitage; and Jackson was not unaware that Poindexter had endorsed John Quincy Adams in 1824.[8]

For a time Poindexter appeared satisfied with the conduct of President Adams. In July, 1825, he submitted a toast lauding "the present Administration" which was offered at a meeting honoring Secretary of State Henry Clay in Cincinnati. Seventeen months later, in a letter to Clay, he maintained the view that the followers of Jackson were "paralized by the prudent and patriotic course of the administration." But by the campaign of 1828 Poindexter had shifted his allegiance. Disappointed by the nationalistic tendencies of the National Republicans, he wrote Jackson that he "had been compelled to relinquish the partiality" that he had once entertained for Adams and his cabinet. The Jackson bandwagon had picked up another passenger.[9]

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man, I, 97; Edward Turner to Quitman, October 10, 1830, Claiborne Papers, Jackson; Natchez *Natchez,* October 30, 1830; *Biographical Sketch of Poindexter,* 10-11; *Mississippi House Journal,* 14 Sess. (November, 1830), 30-31; Brandon to Poindexter, November 25, 1830, Claiborne Papers, Jackson.

[7] Grimball to Poindexter, November 20, 1830, Claiborne Papers, Jackson; Poindexter to Jackson, December 26, 1814, December 12, 1818, Jackson Papers; Claiborne, *Mississippi,* 391.

[8] Natchez *Mississippi Republican,* July 27, 1819; Isaac L. Baker to Jackson, October 24, 1820, William Johnson to Jackson, August 16, 1824, Poindexter to Jackson, December 12, 1818, Jackson Papers; Lewis to Poindexter, October 10, 1822, Claiborne Papers, Jackson.

[9] Port Gibson *Correspondent,* August 11, 1825; Poindexter to Clay, December 1,

When he was an aspirant for the Senate vacancy in January, 1829, Poindexter expressed his whole-hearted confidence in the President-elect. Citing his defense of Jackson's Seminole campaign, he declared that "if there be an individual in Mississippi who has been more faithful to the old General than myself, or who has rendered him more essential service, I should be glad to hear him named, and his services recalled to my recollection."[10]

But Andrew Jackson, it is clear, did not repose unquestioning faith in George Poindexter. Undoubtedly he was aware of the genial fellowship that had long been enjoyed by the new senator and Henry Clay; and perhaps too he was annoyed by the striking physical resemblance between the two men. In later years Poindexter loved to recall his friendly card-playing rivalry with "Harry of the West." Although they subsequently had become political opponents, he never disavowed his lasting friendship for Jackson's unrelenting enemy. "However I may have differed with him on important national questions," he once said, "I hold him to be alike incapable of a dishonorable act in public or private life." Before he left Kentucky, he visited Clay who reported that the Mississippian "talks like an independent man, who . . . was resolved to cling to principal." Such conversation boded no good for the relationship between Poindexter and Jackson.[11]

Soon after reaching Washington, Poindexter called on the President and talked with him in the presence of Secretary of State Martin Van Buren, whom he met for the first time. Although Jackson received him with "cordiality and respect," the trio did not discuss political matters. Van Buren was impressed by the "remarkably sinister expression" of the senator's countenance. Both he and Jackson were convinced that the Mississippian's "open junction with the opponents of the administration was a question of time only." "We are not to his taste," the Old Hero told his Secretary of State.[12]

Poindexter found the role of a United States senator to his liking, and he played the part with gusto. "His carriage and two in the morning, and his coach and four in the evening" were soon familiar sights on the streets of Washington. He dressed his servants in splendid uniforms. Tom, his tall, smiling mulatto coachman, wore a "livery of dark gray

1826, Henry Clay Papers; Poindexter to Jackson, September 5, 1828 (copy), Claiborne Papers, Jackson.

[10] Poindexter to Nathan L. Boulden, January 10, 1829, in Natchez *Statesman and Gazette*, January 22, 1829.

[11] Fitzpatrick (ed.), *Autobiography of Martin Van Buren*, 754-55; Port Gibson *Correspondent*, August 11, 1825; Henry Clay to Josiah S. Johnston, November 14, 1830 (copy), Thomas J. Clay Papers, Library of Congress (copy furnished the author by Professor Charles G. Sellers, Jr.). When Clay visited Natchez in 1830, many Mississippians noted his resemblance to Poindexter. William Burns to Poindexter, March 20, 1830, Claiborne Papers, Jackson.

[12] Fitzpatrick (ed.), *Autobiography of Martin Van Buren*, 754-55.

cloth, with a red cape and cuffs on the coat; red cashmere waistcoat, and grey cloth pantaloons." The senator's health responded to the capital's climate, belying his earlier prediction to friends that he would die before the expiration of his term. By June, 1831, he had discarded his crutches. And in May, 1832, Miss Ann Hewes of Boston became the third Mrs. George Poindexter.[13]

When Poindexter became senator, the coalition that had elected Jackson was fast disintegrating. The ever-widening rift between Vice President John C. Calhoun and Secretary of State Martin Van Buren had split the administration ranks by early 1831. In a letter to the Mississippi legislature, written when he assumed his new office, Poindexter had registered his disapprobation of the protective tariff system and the tendency toward consolidation in the federal government.[14] It should have been no surprise then that his sympathy lay with Calhoun rather than with Van Buren, the pre-eminent architect of the "Tariff of Abominations" and the man Jackson had apparently designated as his political heir.

Poindexter's actual break with the administration resulted from a more local matter, yet one dear to a senator's heart—the dispensation of patronage. Soon after he reached Washington, he learned that Jackson intended to appoint Stokely D. Hays, a Tennessean and nephew of his late wife, as surveyor of public lands in Mississippi. Poindexter protested the appointment of a non-resident to this office, but Jackson, who insisted that such "national offices" were "open to citizens of all the States," persisted in his recommendation. In retaliation, Poindexter obtained passage on February 3, 1831, of a Senate resolution proclaiming the inexpediency of the appointment of citizens of one state to offices in another "without some evident necessity for such appointment." A temporary truce was reached on this issue when the Mississippi senator, "feeling the most anxious solicitude to preserve the friendly relations which had subsisted between the President and myself," arranged a compromise whereby Hays was appointed to the lesser office of register of the Clinton Land Office, while Jackson nominated Gideon Fitz, a friend of Poindexter, to the surveyorship.[15]

Despite this agreement, Poindexter ill-naturedly complained to friends—and Jackson heard of his grumbling—that the Kitchen Cabinet

[13] Washington *Paul Pry*, August 4, 1832; advertisement in Washington *United States Telegraph*, June 4, 1832; G. M. Quarles to Poindexter, January 9, 1834, Claiborne Papers, Jackson; John A. Quitman to J. F. H. Claiborne, July 31, 1831, in Claiborne, *Life of Quitman*, I, 107; Washington *National Intelligencer*, May 17, 1832.

[14] Monticello *Pearl River Advocate*, November 6, 1830.

[15] Jackson to Poindexter, December 20, 1830, Claiborne Papers, Jackson; Jackson to Thomas H. Williams, April, 1831 (copy), Jackson Papers; Vicksburg *Advocate*, September 12, 1831; Vicksburg *Advocate and Register*, April 12, 1832; Washington *National Intelligencer*, July 27, 1832; *Senate Journal*, 23 Cong., 1 Sess., 447.

dictated all appointments to public office in Mississippi. Reports circulated that the senator was no longer to be considered a member of the Jackson party. During the summer and fall recess of Congress, he stayed in Virginia, where John A. Quitman, who visited him at Charlottesville, found him "awfully severe on Jackson." In August Poindexter wrote David Dickson a letter—which was widely published—stating that Jackson "lends his ear too readily to individuals near his person, who are incompetent to advise him, and unworthy of public confidence." "I cannot consent to *worship* men," he wrote. "I bow only at the shrine of principles, and when these are departed from by any man in power, . . . I depart from him."[16]

The breach between Jackson and Poindexter became irreparable at the session of Congress that met in December, 1831. Hays had died and the President nominated another Tennessean, Samuel Gwin, then serving as a postal clerk in Washington, D. C., to the vacant office of register of the Land Office at Clinton. Lame since youth, Gwin was the son of an old comrade of the President and had served in the Louisiana campaign as secretary to General John Coffee. His wife was "threatened with consumption" and might die if she were not taken to a warmer climate. Informing Poindexter of his interest in the vacancy, Gwin appealed to "a brother soldier, who participated so largely in that glorious event, the battle of New Orleans"; but his plea fell on deaf ears. Many Mississippians shared Poindexter's resentment toward the appointment of another non-resident to an office within the state. "When will he send one of us to Alabama or Kentucky or Tennesse[e]?" asked David Dickson. Citing the Senate's resolution of the previous February, Poindexter secured the rejection of Gwin. With this action all social intercourse between the senator and the President ceased. Poindexter did not realize it at the time, but he had created in Samuel Gwin a formidable adversary. "My brother was a warrior," William M. Gwin wrote years later, "an outspoken, determined friend or enemy. . . . He had many elements to make a great party leader." The rejected register was soon in Mississippi waging a vigorous campaign for popular support of his appointment.[17]

[16] Jackson to Williams, April, 1831 (copy), Jackson Papers; Charles H. Ambler, *The Life and Diary of John Floyd, Governor of Virginia, an Apostle of Secession and the Father of the Oregon Country* (Richmond, 1918), 129-30; Quitman to J. F. H. Claiborne, July 31, 1831, in Claiborne, *Life of Quitman,* I, 107; Poindexter to Dickson, August 13, 1831, in *Niles' Register,* XLI (November 19, 1831), 222.

[17] Washington *Globe,* October 6, 1831; Samuel Gwin to Poindexter, October 14, 1831, Dickson to Poindexter, October 18, 1831, Claiborne Papers, Jackson; Samuel Gwin to J. F. H. Claiborne, January 17, 1832, Claiborne Papers, Library of Congress; William M. Gwin to J. F. H. Claiborne, November 10, 1878, "Biographical Sketch of William M. Gwin," J. F. H. Claiborne Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina (hereinafter cited as Claiborne Papers, Chapel Hill).

Poindexter also participated enthusiastically in the rejection of another Jackson appointee—Martin Van Buren as Minister to England. So rancorous was his feeling on the subject that the senatorial debate on the nomination was postponed—"in deference to the excess of his zeal"—until he had recovered from a fall. He sternly reproved Van Buren as the "court favorite," whose every operation was "shrouded in darkness and mystery" and who had forced the dissolution of the cabinet in order to create a rupture between Calhoun and the President.[18]

In his attack upon Van Buren, Poindexter assailed a politician who possessed little popularity in Mississippi. Even the most ardent partisans of Jackson were reluctant to defend the appointment of the former Secretary of State to the London mission. One administration journal condemned the New Yorker "as a dishonest party manager having little in view as a public man save his own elevation" and another denounced his as "a pitiful intriguer—a selfish calculator of chances." "Mr. Van Buren can never become the candidate of the south for the Presidency," said the Natchez *Gazette,* "until we submit to our oppressions, and 'lick the hand just raised to shed our blood.'" Duff Green predicted that Poindexter, who had displayed such "lofty bearing" in opposing Van Buren, would enhance his own well-earned reputation in Mississippi.[19]

If the contest had been clearly between Poindexter and Van Buren, the senator indeed might have increased his standing among his constituents. But the administration forces within the state adroitly converted the issue into one between Old Poins and Old Hickory, under which circumstance the former faced insurmountable odds. Admirers of Jackson resented Poindexter's slurs that the President was "enfeebled by age and debility" and was "fast declining, both in his body and mind." Many erstwhile political friends of the senator renounced their allegiance. "The people of Mississippi," J. F. H. Claiborne wrote his former idol, "will never doubt the patriotism, competency, or republicanism of Andrew Jackson." In the spring of 1832 the friends of Jackson, led by the indefatigable Samuel Gwin, promoted a series of meetings throughout the state to censure Poindexter for his opposition to the administration. While Poindexter's admirers also held public rallies, he won but few converts from the Jackson ranks. Most of his defenders were members of the old Adams-and-Clay party.[20]

[18] Fitzpatrick (ed.), *Autobiography of Martin Van Buren,* 756; *Register of Debates,* 22 Cong., 1 Sess., 1330-44.

[19] Vicksburg *Mississippian,* February 27, 1832; Vicksburg *Advocate and Register,* March 15, 1832, quoting Natchez *Gazette;* Natchez *Gazette,* February 29, 1832; Washington *United States Telegraph,* February 1, 1832.

[20] Poindexter to editor of Raymond *Patriot,* February 25, 1832, in Natchez *Gazette,* April 6, 1832; Claiborne to Poindexter, March 8, 1832, in Claiborne, *Mississippi,* 397-98; Natchez *Gazette,* March 15, 29, April 6, 13, May 4, 1832; Washington *Globe,* April 3, 5, 1832; Vicksburg *Advocate and Register,* April 5, May 10, 1832; Washington *United States Telegraph,* April 24, 1832.

Poindexter's hostility to Jackson set him at variance with his colleague, Powhatan Ellis, the tall, stately, mild-mannered native Virginian whose senatorial career had been manifestly void of distinction. His chief characteristics as a legislator, one critic said, had been "inertness and want of energy"; and in the Senate he had "attracted no further notice than an occasional expression of wonder how he ever got there." His "catalogue of Senatorial qualifications," wrote another, "amounted to a courtly bow or a party vote."[21]

By 1832 Ellis was tiring of life in Washington; and when Peter Randolph, the federal judge for the district of Mississippi, died in January, he coveted the appointment to the vacancy. He supported the nomination of Van Buren—although not vigorously, for he never did anything vigorously—and in February reported that his attachment to Jackson, "so far from being weakened, is strengthened in consequence of unmerited opposition raised in a quarter where we did not suppose it could by possibility exist." Ellis declared that Poindexter had joined the Calhoun forces in an attempt to overthrow the administration. Poindexter hastened to deny that he had ever "known or sought to know the opinion of Mr. Calhoun, in relation to any subject on which I have given a vote in the senate." "It is natural enough," he continued, "for a man, who is himself a servile sycophant, who 'bends the knee [to] Baal,' and records the edicts of the executive, in the hope of receiving the crumbs of office as his reward, to imagine that similar motives govern the actions of other men." When Ellis was awarded the federal judgeship a few months later, Duff Green asserted that "he holds his office at the price of the most disgraceful subservience to Gen. Jackson."[22]

Neither Andrew Jackson nor Samuel Gwin was willing to acknowledge defeat in their continuing battle with Poindexter. The President, rejecting the validity of the Senate's resolution contravening the nomination of citizens of one state to offices in another, favored at first recommending another non-resident for the Clinton office, but he ultimately decided to reappoint Gwin. William McKendree Gwin, who had recently moved to Mississippi, wrote Andrew Jackson Donelson, the president's secretary, that "my brother is entirely willing to let his case be the test." The applicant's father, James Gwin, a Methodist minister, circulated a letter from the President complaining of the rejection by the Senate. Samuel Gwin took personal charge of the fight for his reappointment. He forwarded to Washington petitions on his behalf—one of them drawn up by J. F. H. Claiborne and endorsed "by all the prominent members of the democratic party" in the state. In June, 1832,

[21] Natchez *Natchez,* August 10, 1832; Vicksburg *Advocate and Register,* September 6, 1832.

[22] Natchez *Gazette,* March 7, May 11, 1832; Washington *United States Telegraph,* July 25, 1832.

the President once again nominated him as register of the Clinton Land Office.[23]

The Senate, declining to reconsider its earlier action, laid the President's renomination on the table prior to its summer adjournment. When Jackson gave Gwin a recess appointment to the same office less than one week later, the case assumed aspects of a cause célèbre. Denying the legality of the President's action, the anti-administration press denounced it as "unwarrantable," "insulting to the Senatorial body," and an example of "unscrupulous and unhesitating dictatorship." In exasperation, Poindexter wrote a long letter to the Mississippi legislature relating "the difficulties I have had to encounter in the discharge of my duty to the State." On the other hand, Attorney General Roger B. Taney upheld the constitutionality of the reappointment while Francis P. Blair, in the columns of the *Globe,* championed its expediency. Blair devoted over a full page of the August 3 issue of the administration organ to a discussion of "The Case of Samuel Gwynn"—a "lucid and intelligent exposé" in the opinion of the President.[24]

In the autumn of 1832 Poindexter returned to Mississippi to defend his course of action at a series of public dinners sponsored by opponents of the administration. At a Vicksburg barbecue, held on September 14, he contrasted his relationship towards the administration with that of the boy who had been instructed to plough behind the red heifer. " 'John,' said a farmer to his boy, 'plough straight to that heifer'—when the farmer returned to see how his work was done, he found very crooked furrows, and explained in a rage, 'John, what the deuce are you doing?' 'I am ploughing all round the field after the heifer, sir, as you told me.' " Poindexter contended that if he had conformed to the "shifting politics of the administration in *all* things," he would have abandoned the "interests of his constituents, as well as the principles upon which he went into office."[25]

The President's reappointment of Gwin made that an unavoidable issue during the session of Congress that met in December, 1832. Poindexter's position was seriously imperiled by the overwhelming vote awarded the Jackson-Van Buren ticket in Mississippi in the November election. So all-pervading was the popularity of Old Hickory in the state that no Clay ticket was organized, although the opponents of Van

[23] Undated draft to the Senate written about December, 1831, or January, 1832, Jackson Papers, Second Series; William M. Gwin to Donelson, March 19, 1832, Donelson Papers, Library of Congress; Washington *United States Telegraph,* March 26, 1832; Samuel Gwin to Claiborne, January 17, 1832, Claiborne Papers, Library of Congress.

[24] *Journal of the Senate,* 23 Cong., 1 Sess., 449; Washington *Globe,* August 3, 1832, quoting New York *American;* Washington *National Intelligencer,* July 25, 27, 1832; Jackson to William B. Lewis, August 18, 1832, in John Spencer Bassett (ed.), *The Correspondence of Andrew Jackson,* 7 vols. (Washington, 1926-1935), IV, 466.

[25] Vicksburg *Advocate and Register,* September 20, 1832.

Buren selected a group of electoral candidates pledged to Jackson for the presidency and Philip P. Barbour of Virginia as his running mate. Yet the Jackson-Van Buren ticket led in all counties except Wilkinson, Marion, and Greene, and carried the state by a popular margin of almost three-to-one. In Mississippi partisans of the President drew up new petitions in favor of Gwin, one of them sanctioned by several members of the constitutional convention that met at Jackson during the fall of 1832. Of the eighteen delegates from the counties served by the Clinton land office, fifteen signed the memorial urging Gwin's retention in his office.[26]

Nevertheless Poindexter was resolved to block the nomination of Gwin for a third time. In executive session he introduced a resolution branding the recess appointment as "a palpable violation of the constitution, and a dangerous usurpation of power." The President delayed sending his latest renomination of Gwin to the Senate until February 22, 1833; five days later the register was again rejected on the grounds that his appointment was in violation of the Senate resolution opposing nonresident officeholders. This time, however, Poindexter was able to muster a majority of only one.[27]

Jackson was equally determined not to recognize the principle of the Senate resolution of February 3, 1831. He quickly appointed two other residents of Tennessee to the registership at Clinton. Both nominations were promptly rejected. Consequently, on March 2, 1833, he notified the Senate that he would not propose any more nominations to that office until that body rescinded the displeasing resolution, which he regarded as an unconstitutional restraint upon the powers of the executive.[28]

In its next move the Senate was probably influenced by political "logrolling" arising from the compromise legislation of 1833. On the very day the President's message was dispatched to the upper house, it agreed to rescind the controversial resolution. The vote was seventeen to nine; many National Republicans and Nullifiers (including Poindexter) abstained. Jackson immediately submitted the names of several persons for the vacant offices in Mississippi. Gwin, though not renamed to his old post at Clinton, was appointed register of a new land office established in the northwestern portion of the state. The nomination was immediately approved without a division.[29]

Just what caused this reversal by the Senate we can only surmise. Perhaps it was part of an arrangement between the National Republican and administration forces whereby the passage of Clay's Distribution

[26] Washington *Globe,* January 2, 1833; William M. Gwin to Andrew Jackson Donelson, November 7, 1832, Donelson Papers.

[27] *Journal of the Senate,* 23 Cong., 1 Sess., 450-51.

[28] *Ibid.,* 22 Cong., 2 Sess., 292-98; *ibid.,* 23 Cong., 1 Sess., 454; John Black to John A. Quitman, March 2, 1833, Claiborne Papers, Jackson.

[29] *Journal of the Senate,* 23 Cong., 1 Sess., 454-55.

Bill would not be obstructed. Or perhaps some reasoned that in view of the nullification crisis the Senate's earlier resolution concerning the presidential appointing power was unwise; it might become necessary to appoint residents of other states to enforce the federal laws in South Carolina. It might have been pointed out (but no one did) that Samuel Gwin, who had received his first appointment in Mississippi a year and a half earlier, had long since qualified as a resident of that state.

Thus the "Case of Samuel Gwin" ended in a victory for the President and a defeat for the senator from Mississippi. On the surface the issue of their disagreement seemed an insignificant one—the appointment of a register of a land office. Often, however, matters concerning patronage and personalities weigh more heavily in the minds of politicians than questions of momentous national policy. Surely they engender more personal rancor. And the ill will arising from the "Case of Samuel Gwin" produced an implacable enmity between the President and the man he once referred to as "that damned rascal Poindexter." During the first half of Jackson's second administration not even his well-known animosity towards Clay and Calhoun was commensurate with the malevolence that he carried in his heart for Mississippi's "senator of lofty bearing."[30]

[30] Washington *United States Telegraph,* March 21, 1835, quoting Baltimore *Patriot.* For references to Poindexter's "lofty bearing"—a phrase apparently coined by Duff Green—see Washington *United States Telegraph,* February 1, March 17, 1832, July 18, 1834; Washington *Globe,* October 4, 1832, quoting Clinton *Constitutional Flag.*

CHAPTER V

A NATION DIVIDING

"We Detest the tariff, but will hold to the Union."
Samuel Gwin[1]

During the eighteen-twenties sectionalism emerged as a dominant influence in American politics. The question of slavery, although raised earlier during the controversy over the admission of Missouri to the Union, was not yet the fundamental divisive issue. During Jackson's first administration the debates concerning the public lands, internal improvements, and the tariff bore witness to the conflicting economic interests of the different sections of the nation. The Webster-Hayne debate of 1830 dramatized the rival efforts of the East and the South to form an alliance with the West. To most Mississippians a political coalition of the South and West seemed a logical one because their state contained elements of both sections.

The public lands question was of paramount interest to Mississippians. When Jackson became President, the Choctaw and Chickasaw Indians occupied most of the central and northern portions of the state. In 1829 and 1830 the General Assembly, following the precedent of the Georgia legislature, passed laws extending the legal processes of the state over the Indian territories within its borders. The Choctaws and Chickasaws were thus confronted with the alternative of submitting to the rule of the state or subscribing to the terms of the federal government for their removal west of the Mississippi River.[2]

The Choctaws were loath to leave the state but even more reluctant to bow to the laws of Mississippi. "I had never expected that such a resolution would have been sanctioned by our friends in Mississippi," Mingo Musholatubee, one of their chiefs, wrote to Governor Gerard C. Brandon. Nor were the Choctaws placated by the governor's assurances that "we done this not from any unfriendly feelings to our red Brothers—it was done for your safety and protection."[3]

Jackson appointed John H. Eaton, his Secretary of War, and General John Coffee, an old comrade, to negotiate a treaty with the Choctaws to effect the removal of the tribe west of the Mississippi. When the

[1] Gwin to Andrew Jackson Donelson, January 6, 1832 [1833], Donelson Papers.
[2] *Mississippi Session Laws,* 12 Sess. (1829), 81-83; *ibid.,* 13 Sess. (1830), 5-6.
[3] Musholatubee to Brandon, June 17, 1830, Brandon to Musholatubee, July 13, 1830, Governor's Papers, Series E, No. 18, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

Choctaw chiefs displayed an unwillingness to comply with the proposed treaty, Eaton warned them that the President had no authority to prevent the state from enforcing its laws within their lands. "Your great father approaches and tells you, to go," Eaton wrote, "for your happiness depends upon it." The Secretary of War promised the Choctaws "absolute title to a country, larger than the one you have, & of better soil, . . . in a situation where being out of a state; and where no state will ever be formed, you will find happiness and be able to live under your own laws." On September 27, 1830, the tribal chiefs met with Eaton and Coffee at Dancing Rabbit Creek, in present-day Noxubee County, and signed a treaty ceding their lands in Mississippi in exchange for transportation and title to lands west of the Mississippi that were guaranteed to them forever.[4]

On October 10, 1830, a public dinner at Parker's Hotel in Natchez celebrated the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek. Robert J. Walker, the orator for the occasion, anticipated a surging wave of settlers from the older states that would promote an unexampled prosperity in Mississippi. John A. Quitman, who had supported Adams in 1828, chided his fellow opponents of Jackson who refused to attend the banquet; the President, he averred, deserved "the heartfelt gratitude of every patriotic citizen of this state."[5]

Two years later, on October 20, 1832, General Coffee negotiated a treaty with the Chickasaw Indians similar to the one adopted at Dancing Rabbit Creek. This Treaty of Pontotoc was proclaimed on March 1, 1833, during the last week of Jackson's first administration.[6] Thus the President did not disappoint his Mississippi friends who expected him to expedite the withdrawal of the Indians west of the "Father of Waters." Within four years the area of potential white settlement in the state had more than doubled.

With the transfer of the Indian lands to the public domain, the United States government possessed approximately two-thirds of the land within Mississippi. Realizing that the future development of the state was contingent upon an ever-increasing population, most Mississippians endorsed a public land policy that would make land available to settlers in small amounts and for a moderate sum. Although the Land Act of 1820 had reduced the minimum price of public lands to $1.25 per acre and the minimum amount that could be purchased to eighty acres, it required cash payments. Many prospective immigrants did not possess the $100 required to obtain land under this statute. In 1825 a committee of the General Assembly, noting that "swarms of

[4] Eaton to John Pitchlynn, August 5, 1830, Jackson Papers; *United States Statutes at Large,* VII, 333-39; H. S. Halbert, "Story of the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit," *Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society,* VI (1902), 373-402.
[5] Natchez *Gazette,* October 20, 1830.
[6] *United States Statutes at Large,* VII, 381-87.

American citizens" were departing for Texas "to avail themselves of the flattering prospects which are held out in the Mexican Dominions," urged a more liberal land policy on the part of the United States.[7]

To offer land on attractive terms to potential settlers, western spokesmen in Congress, led by Senator Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri, demanded a lowering of the minimum acreage obtainable at public auction, the gradual reduction of the minimum price of land remaining unsold after several years on the market, and a permanent pre-emption program. In Congress Mississippians usually served on the public lands committees of both houses, a recognition of the state's paramount concern with that question. During Jackson's first administration Senator Poindexter and Representative Plummer vigorously advocated a more liberal land policy. In 1832, for example, Plummer warmly supported the successful movement to reduce the minimum quantity of land purchasable at auction to forty acres.[8]

As a candidate for Congress in 1830, William L. Sharkey contended that the manufacturing interests opposed a liberal public land policy "because by restricting the inducements to emigrate, they are enabled to keep their laborers at home at reduced wages, and thereby avail themselves of the benefits which result to them from the Tariff system."[9] During Jackson's first administration the affinity between the issues of the tariff and public lands was unmistakably evident in the discussions of the various proposals for the distribution of the revenue derived from the sale of the public domain.

Hoping to embarrass presidential aspirant Henry Clay, administration senators voted in 1832 to refer certain measures concerning public lands to the committee on manufactures headed by the Kentuckian. With the liquidation of the national debt imminent, Clay proposed to distribute the revenue from the public land sales among the states according to population. This suggestion met with favor in the manufacturing East, but it was generally unpopular in the agricultural South and West. Westerners objected because they felt it would benefit the heavily populated East, which had already profited from previous land sales. They also feared that the growth of their section would be retarded as long as the public lands were primarily regarded as a source of revenue. Southerners demurred because they felt that the problem of the impending surplus revenue should be dealt with by a reduction in the tariff rather than by a distribution program, which they felt would necessitate

[7] Cleo Hearon, "Nullification in Mississippi," *Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society,* XII (1912), 38; *Mississippi House Journal,* 8 Sess. (1825), 42-43.

[8] *Register of Debates,* 22 Cong., 1 Sess., 2260-71; *ibid.,* 22 Cong., 2 Sess., 119; *ibid.,* 23 Cong., 1 Sess., 4475.

[9] Natchez *Natchez,* June 5, 1830.

the retention of high import duties to maintain the functions of the federal government.

In order to appease the Westerners, Clay proposed that ten per cent of the revenue be laid aside for the new states and that each state's share be determined by its representation in the electoral college, a concession to the less populous sections of the Union. In addition, Senator Poindexter secured as a proviso to the bill a grant of 500,000 acres each to the new states of Mississippi, Missouri, and Louisiana. Although Poindexter heartily supported Clay's proposal as amended, his colleague Powhatan Ellis opposed it.[10]

Following Ellis' resignation in July, 1832, John Black, former state Supreme Court judge, was chosen as the new senator from Mississippi. Elected as a Jacksonian, he disagreed sharply with Poindexter on the issue of distribution. He denounced the 500,000-acre grant offered to Mississippi as a bribe to induce that state to surrender its own interests. In his maiden address, delivered on January 16, 1833, he reminded his colleagues that "it was the thirty pieces of silver which produced the surrender of the Saviour of the universe." "For one," he said, "I have determined to refuse the bounty, reject the pay, and decline the service." Black questioned the constitutionality of distribution. "Can we be assured," he asked prophetically, "that the General Government, having the power to raise funds and distribute them will not in time be enabled to buy up the assent of the states to the exercise of any and every power?"[11]

In delivering his first senatorial speech, Black was "very much embarrassed for I did not know for some time whether I was on my head or heels—some of my friends said I made tolerably sensible talk—if I did I was not aware of it." Although his argument was couched in language that might well have been uttered by Poindexter, the latter failed to concur that the new senator had talked sensibly. "Sir, for what purpose am I sent here," Poindexter asked, "if it be not to advocate measures, conferring benefits on my constituents?" He cited various needs that might be supplied from the sale of lands offered the state of Mississippi: "Have we not numerous rivers capable of being rendered navigable . . .? Are there no canals to be cut . . .? Are there no colleges and seminaries of learning in the State, calling for endowments . . .?" Was his honorable colleague "unmindful of these wants?"[12]

Just as one might have attributed Black's arguments against the distribution program to Poindexter, so the latter's reasoning in its support might easily have been made by Franklin E. Plummer. The people of east Mississippi expected their representative to secure federal aid

[10] *Register of Debates*, 22 Cong., 1 Sess., 1096.
[11] *Ibid.*, 22 Cong., 2 Sess., 104-11.
[12] Black to John A. Quitman, January 23, 1833, Claiborne Papers, Jackson; *Register of Debates*, 22 Cong., 2 Sess., 148-49.

for internal improvements. His predecessor, General Thomas Hinds, had been condemned for his failure to advocate such measures. Yet Plummer opposed the distribution proposal urged by Clay and Poindexter. When the Mississippi representative voted against the bill in July, 1832, Poindexter wrote a public letter accusing him of deserting the interests of his constituents. In March, 1833, Plummer attempted to delay consideration of a similar bill. John Quincy Adams, then a representative from Massachusetts, found him "especially tedious and provoking."[13]

It is apparent that partisan politics was largely the explanation for the opposing stands maintained by Plummer and Poindexter on the distribution question. When Poindexter supported Clay's program, he had already broken with Jackson and entertained no qualms in advocating the favorite plan of the President's hated rival. On the other hand, Plummer sought to reconcile his constituents' mania for internal improvements with Jackson's Maysville Road veto. He opposed the distribution program on the grounds that it was grossly unfair to the new states. But he favored the alternative proposal, popular in the West, for the cession of the public lands to the states in which they lay.[14] Such a program would have greatly benefited Mississippi—but it had no chance of congressional approval.

During Jackson's first administration the tariff was easily the most controversial sectional issue. In 1828 Senator Martin Van Buren, seeking to promote Jackson's candidacy in the West and Middle States and to strengthen his own position in New York politics, successfully steered through Congress a new tariff measure under circumstances puzzling to contemporaries and historians alike. As originally proposed, the bill provided for substantial increases on duties for molasses, sail duck, hemp, flax, raw wool, and iron, but only moderate protection for woolens. Western farmers and Pennsylvania iron mongers were pleased, but New England woolens manufacturers, distillers, rope-makers, and shipbuilders denounced the measure. Many politicians shared John Randolph's conviction that the proposed bill was designed merely to assist in "the manufacture of a President" and reasoned that Van Buren and other advocates of the measure anticipated its defeat by combined New England and southern opposition. Representative William Haile, for example, expected that "the Yankees will themselves oppose it on account of the hemp & molassses."[15]

[13] Edward Turner to John A. Quitman, July 4, 1830, Claiborne Papers, Jackson; Vicksburg *Advocate and Register,* July 26, 1832; *Register of Debates,* 22 Cong., 2 Sess., 1919-20; Adams (ed.), *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams,* VIII, 531.

[14] Vicksburg *Advocate and Register,* January 19, 1832; *Register of Debates,* 22 Cong., 2 Sess., 1747.

[15] *Register of Debates,* 20 Cong., 1 Sess., 2472; Robert V. Remini, "Martin Van Buren and the Tariff of Abominations," *American Historical Review,* LXIII

Senator Powhatan Ellis, alarmed at the air of mystery surrounding the tariff debates, wrote his brother that he disliked "exceedingly to see such practices introduced and countenanced in a Govt like ours." Much to the dismay of southern Jacksonians, amendments affecting the schedules for raw wool and woolens were approved to make the measure more palatable to New England manufacturing interests and the bill narrowly passed both houses of Congress. Van Buren's role in securing the adoption of the new legislation did not endear him to the antitariff forces in Mississippi. Four years later, when the state Jacksonian leaders rallied to the standard of the New Yorker, Senator Poindexter inquired if they were "prepared to idolize the man who fixed on them that 'bill of abominations' the tariff of 1828."[16]

Jackson's own position on the tariff, as revealed in his early messages to Congress, was not entirely clear. On one occasion he expressed the view that "the great interests of agriculture, commerce, and manufactures should be equally favored"; and later he declared that "the North, the South, the East and the West, should unite in diminishing any burthen of which either may justly complain." But he alienated many of his followers in the South—and particularly in South Carolina—by his defense of the constitutionality of the protective tariff.[17]

The tariff was an issue in Mississippi, too, although the proponents of a protective policy were in a decided minority in the predominantly agricultural state. Yet the *Natchez,* the organ of the National Republicans, was a vigorous advocate of Clay's "American System" and felt that the party names should be "Tariff" and "Anti-Tariff" rather than "Jackson" and "Adams." The Natchez *Gazette* agreed with its rival on the importance of the tariff as an issue and declared that it "is the great landmark, in the South, that divides the two parties."[18]

The Mississippi adherents of a protective tariff argued the issue on grounds designed to appeal to agricultural rather than manufacturing interests. In 1830 a petition was circulated in the state urging the retention of high duties on sugar. The petitioners warned that if sugar were not granted adequate protection the planters of neighboring Louisiana might turn to the production of cotton, thereby flooding the New Orleans commission houses. Some also contemplated that sugar would become the staple crop of the lower Pearl River region of Mississippi. When Charles B. Green announced his candidacy for the United States Senate

(July, 1958), 903-17; Haile to John A. Quitman, February 25, 1828, Claiborne Papers, Jackson.

[16] Powhatan Ellis to Charles Ellis, May 13, 1828 (copy), Powhatan Ellis Folder, Subject File, Mississippi Department of Archives and History; Poindexter to editor of Raymond *Patriot,* March 31, 1832, in Natchez *Gazette,* May 11, 1832.

[17] James D. Richardson (comp.), *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897,* 10 vols. (Washington, 1896-1899), II, 437, 450, 523.

[18] Natchez *Natchez,* August 14, 1830; Natchez *Gazette,* September 22, 1830.

in 1830, he urged that cotton and cotton manufactured goods, as well as sugar, receive the blessings of a protective tariff.[19]

Most Mississippians were openly hostile to the protective principle. In 1830 the Natchez *Gazette* estimated that the tariff annually cost the citizens of the state approximately $6 million. A resident of Wilkinson County lamented the state's undiversified economy that permitted the tariff to inflict such hardships upon its inhabitants. "We are tributary for everything, and deserve to be so—," he said. "The Tariff would recoil upon its *authors*, if we lived as our fathers did. I presume there are ten spinning wheels and two looms in the county—such a thing as a slay, harness, shuttle or spindle is unknown, and if we want one of either we must send to yankee town for them."[20]

The "Bill of Abominations" did much to consolidate public opinion of the state against the tariff system. In 1829 Governor Brandon denounced the measure as legislation designed to benefit the manufacturer at the expense of the farmer, mechanic, merchant, and mariner. The General Assembly passed a resolution "that the Tariff of 1828 is contrary to the spirit of the Constitution of the United States; impolitic and oppressive in its operation in the Southern States, and ought to be resisted by all constitutional means."[21]

In the congressional race of 1830 all candidates except one were unalterably opposed to the protective principle. Even John H. Norton, the only National Republican in the field, although arguing against a "sudden change" in the existing policy, announced his opposition to a tariff "beyond a reasonable and moderate protection to domestic industry." That same year the Natchez *Gazette* chided the *Natchez* for its continued support of the "American System." The editor declared that "if this is really a tariff country; if the Jackson party is disposed to sustain the 'System' upon which Mr. Clay has now embarked his fortunes, . . . we might as well pull down our colours and surrender the ship."[22]

With the election of George Poindexter to the United States Senate in 1830, Mississippi contributed one of the leaders of the antitariff movement in Congress. Upon his appointment to that office he expressed his unequivocal hostility to the protective system; and in 1831 he played a leading role at the Philadelphia free trade convention. His break with the Jackson administration added fuel to his zeal against the tariff. In December, 1831, he announced that he saw no hope for a substantial

[19] Natchez *Natchez,* August 14, 1830; Monticello *Pearl River Advocate,* May 7, 1830; Natchez *Gazette,* November 20, 1830.

[20] Natchez *Gazette,* November 20, 1830; Woodville *Mississippi Democrat,* February 5, 1831.

[21] *Mississippi House Journal,* 12 Sess. (1829), 12; *Mississippi Session Laws,* 12 Sess. (1829), 108-09.

[22] Natchez *Natchez,* June 26, 1830; Natchez *Gazette,* September 22, 1830.

reduction of the existing duties as long as the President upheld the constitutionality of the protective policy. He vehemently opposed the administration-sponsored tariff of 1832 as "worse than the bill of abominations of 1828." Although Representative Franklin E. Plummer voted for the new measure, Poindexter opposed it on the grounds that its passage tended to insure the permanence of high import duties.[23]

South Carolina had long led in the fight against the protective tariff. In 1828 Vice President John C. Calhoun outlined in his anonymous *South Carolina Exposition and Protest* a procedure of state action in case the federal government exceeded its constitutional powers. After his break with the Jackson administration, Calhoun, in his Fort Hill Address of July, 1831, elaborated on this political doctrine, popularly known as nullification. According to Calhoun's theory, if the people of a state, acting in convention, should nullify a law thought to be unconstitutional, then the United States must submit the law to the people of all the states. If conventions in three-fourths of the states upheld the law, then its constitutionality would be conceded; otherwise it would be null and void. Following the passage of the tariff of 1832, South Carolina's political leaders determined to test the workability of nullification.

Although most Mississippians shared the antipathy of South Carolinians against the tariff, they did not display the Palmetto enthusiasm for nullification. Governor Brandon remonstrated against the "Tariff of Abominations," but at the same time he asserted that "it is not a power delegated to an individual state to declare any act of Congress unconstitutional."[24] The tariff never became the momentous issue in Mississippi that it was in South Carolina, for the policies of President Jackson were generally popular in the Southwest. Particularly were Mississippians pleased by the treaties providing for the removal of the Indians from the state.

Jackson's personal popularity was indeed the most potent weapon against nullification in Mississippi. When the Calhoun-Van Buren breach was publicly revealed in early 1831, there was a decided sentiment in Mississippi in favor of the South Carolinian. The Natchez *Gazette,* normally an ardent administration journal, contended that "the people of this state" regarded Calhoun "next to Gen. Jackson, as the most influential, enlightened and distinguished man in the Republican ranks." But after the Fort Hill Address the *Gazette* declared: "The claims of our venerated Chief Magistrate, are paramount to all others; and no man can divide, with him, the affections of the people of Mississippi."[25]

[23] Poindexter to "Members of the Legislature," October 1, 1830, in Monticello *Pearl River Advocate,* November 6, 1830; Washington *United States Telegraph,* September 29, 1831; Poindexter to editor of Raymond *Patriot,* December 19, 1831, in Vicksburg *Mississippian,* February 13, 1832; *Register of Debates,* 22 Cong., 1 Sess., 619-20, 1187, 1290.

[24] *Mississippi House Journal,* 12 Sess. (1829), 12.

[25] Natchez *Gazette,* April 20, September 14, 1831.

Yet the Nullifiers were not without influential leaders in Mississippi. Included among their ranks were Senator George Poindexter, Chancellor John A. Quitman, and jurists George Winchester, Isaac Caldwell, Cotesworth Pinckney Smith, and William L. Sharkey.[26] The two foremost members of the State Rights faction were Poindexter and Quitman.

As early as 1831 Poindexter was considered a member of "the little Senate" to which Calhoun "gives laws." He usually voted with the Nullifying bloc whose other members were Senators Robert Y. Hayne and Stephen D. Miller of South Carolina, Gabriel Moore of Alabama, and, at times, Littleton W. Tazewell and John Tyler of Virginia. Poindexter did yeoman service for the Nullifiers during the crucial session of Congress that met in December, 1832. When Calhoun resigned as Vice President to serve as senator from South Carolina, Poindexter was widely mentioned as a candidate for the president *pro tempore* of the Senate. But he declined to seek the honor because the presiding officer could not participate in the debates. Throughout the session he kept up a running attack on the administration. When the President expressed hope for a reduction of the tariff in his annual message, the Mississippian demanded that the Secretary of the Treasury report what duties might be reduced immediately. He characterized the President's Nullification Proclamation as a "Pope's bull, from which none of the church may dare to dissent, without incurring the vengeance of the Almighty." It was "a political lecture in the nature of a 4th of July oration, and a very bad one too."[27]

"When I am asked, as I have often been, the question, 'Are you a nullifier?' " Poindexter later explained, "I answer by asking another question, 'What do you mean by nullification?' " The senator contended that there were so many conflicting definitions of "this despised word," that it was difficult for him either to confirm or deny that he subscribed to the theory of nullification. "If it means, as we are told it does, in the proclamation of President Jackson, treason, rebellion, revolution, or disunion," Poindexter declared, "then am I no nullifier." But, he continued, "if it is understood in the light of a remedy by State interposition, to counteract usurped power on the part of the Federal Government, and thereby protect each State in the full enjoyment of its reserved rights, then I maintain, that to this extent, it is the true theory of the constitution."[28]

In a well-prepared speech begun on February 19, 1833, and completed the following day, Poindexter opposed the Force Bill, which he

[26] So many judges played an active part in the nullification movement in Mississippi that the Jacksonians criticized judicial officials for engaging in political activities. Jackson *Mississippian,* January 24, 1834.

[27] Washington *Globe,* October 11, 1831, quoting New York *Journal of Commerce;* Charles M. Wiltse, *John C. Calhoun, Nullifier, 1829-1839* (Indianapolis, 1949), 169; *Register of Debates,* 22 Cong., 2 Sess., 12, 607.

[28] *Register of Debates,* 23 Cong., 1 Sess., 1285-86.

assailed as a measure "to repeal the constitution of the United States and to vest in the President despotic powers." The greater part of his oration was a historical defense of nullification and it embodied, Henry Clay thought, "all which could be brought to bear on his side of the question." Two principal targets of his abuse were Andrew Jackson and Daniel Webster. For the President he suggested a message to be delivered to the federal troops: "To arms, then, and vanquish these haughty sons of Carolina; let your watchword be tribute or extermination." Contrasting Webster's failure to support the War of 1812 with his advocacy of Jackson in 1833, he insinuated that the New Englander had earlier been guilty of either treachery, cowardice or both. "The Senator from Massachusetts ranges himself on the side of power," he said. "I take my stand with those who seek to limit power within its defined boundaries. He supports the supremacy of the laws; I defend the rights of the people." With the words "Resistance to tyrants is obedience to God!" Poindexter sat down.[29]

Webster, it was reported, was grieviously offended by Poindexter's caustic remarks. After the nullification crisis had subsided with the passage of the Compromise Tariff of 1833, Clay played once again the familiar role of pacificator. He expressed the hope that the rift between the two senators would not be a permanent one. Poindexter then conceded that "perhaps in the ardor of my feeling, I went too far; and, if so, I deeply regret it." After Webster disavowed "any intention to offer any personal disrespect" toward the Mississippian, the two men shook hands and the reconciliation was effected.[30]

On the question of nullification Poindexter took the most forthright stand of any Mississippian in Congress. Although Senator John Black generally sustained the administration during the crucial session, he refused to vote for the Force Bill and reported that he was in "bad odour" with the party leaders in Washington. In the House, Franklin E. Plummer's course was also ambiguous. Despite the fact that he had voted for the Tariff of 1832 and had recently been re-elected as a Jacksonian, he opposed the Force Bill and criticised the President's Nullification Proclamation as an "ultrafederal document." If the administration forces "expect me to act with them in our elections," he wrote a friend, "they must be mum about the 'Proclamation' and the Force Bill."[31]

Yet Plummer refused to join the Nullifiers outright. In August, 1833, Charles C. Mayson, editor of the Jackson *State Rights Banner,*

[29] *Ibid.,* 22 Cong., 2 Sess., 602-61, 811.
[30] *Ibid.,* 810-12.
[31] Black to John A. Quitman, March 2, 1833, Claiborne Papers, Jackson; *Register of Debates,* 22 Cong., 2 Sess., 1810, 1897; Jackson *Mississippian,* September 4, 1835; Plummer to Bethel Haynes, April 4, 1834, in Natchez *Mississippi Free Trader,* September 29, 1835.

expressed disappointment after hearing the representative deliver a speech on the subject of state rights. Mayson wished that "the gentleman had been more explicit. He left us rather to *infer* what his opinions are on this delicate topic and whose inferences may be right we cannot tell." Plummer later asserted that although he agreed with the Nullifiers "in principle," he felt it "inexpedient to follow them to the brink of dissolution." Nor did he think it incumbent upon him to oppose other administration measures. Because of his independent course, he became the target of a "cross-fire levelled at me from the two extremes. The national republicans and nullifiers [he said later] cannonaded me upon the bank and land questions, and the Simon Pure Jackson presses on the enforcing bill."[32]

While Poindexter espoused the cause of nullification in Washington, John A. Quitman was the faction's chief spokesman in Mississippi. Despite his earlier association with the Adams-and-Clay party, the chancellor became an enthusiastic convert to the South Carolina school. In 1831 he was delighted to discover in conversation with Poindexter that they entertained strikingly similar views on the political questions of the day. Because of his pre-eminent concern with nullification he declined in 1832 to serve as an electoral candidate for a ticket pledged to the Bank of the United States. Although he considered the Bank "a valuable institution," he did not "consider the question of rechartering it the *only or the most important* one" then facing the nation. There were, he insisted, "several great questions of constitutional construction and national policy, much more vitally interesting to the people of the United States, and particularly to the citizens of the South." Another Nullifier, Supreme Court Justice Cotesworth Pinckney Smith also declined to serve as a Bank elector because of "a settled conviction resting on my mind, of the unconstitutionality" of that institution.[33]

But the Nullifiers of Mississippi were in a substantial minority. In Natchez the surviving leaders of the pro-Jackson "Junto" worked closely with members of the old Adams-and-Clay faction in support of the national administration. Twenty-seven prominent citizens of Adams County issued a call for a "Union Meeting," held on January 7, at which Robert J. Walker delivered a stirring oration against disunion. In Hinds County Samuel Gwin was industrious in his efforts to engender popular enthusiasm for Old Hickory's stand. He supervised the printing and distribution of 4,000 copies of the Nullification Proclamation and arranged for an anti-nullification rally at Clinton, which he described to Andrew Jackson Donelson as the largest meeting ever held

[32] Vicksburg *Advocate and Register,* August 28, 1833, quoting Jackson *State Rights Banner; Register of Debates,* 23 Cong., 1 Sess., 4820, 4835.

[33] Claiborne, *Life of Quitman,* I, 107; Quitman to James K. Cook, August 20, 1832, Smith to Cook, August 18, 1832, in Natchez *Natchez,* September 7, 1832.

in the county. "You can rest assured S.C. has our sympathies," he wrote the presidential secretary, "but we cannot support her in her mad career of seperation [*sic*]."[34]

When the Mississippi legislature met on January 8, 1833, the opponents of nullification possessed an overwhelming majority in the House of Representatives while the Senate was more closely divided on that subject. The Nullifiers hoped that the legislature would decline to commit itself on South Carolina's course, but their leaders were concerned. Quitman, noting that the actions of the President "appear to receive the sanction of popular meetings," wrote his friend, Nathan G. Howard, then a representative from Rankin County, that "I trust in God that the sovereign state of Mississippi will not sustain the political principles of the President's proclamation." In his opinion, "Carolina tho' she may be wrong has taken the field in our cause." He regretted that he was not a member of the legislature; he would "glory in martyrdom in such a cause." [35]

In his message to the legislature Governor Abram M. Scott, long identified with Poindexter in state politics and known to be sympathetic to the Nullifiers, made only one brief reference to the difficulties between South Carolina and the Union. In denouncing the protective tariff he declared that "the general Government has persisted in this most unjust and oppressive system until one of the States . . . has been induced to believe that no relief was to be expected and has entered upon a course which seems to threaten a dissolution of the Union." He expressed the hope that Congress would modify the obnoxious law to "restore harmony and good feeling once more, between the different sections of our beloved country."[36]

Although a correspondent of the Natchez *Courier* reported early in January that "Nullification is hardly talked of" by the legislators, that question was discussed at considerable length before the session ended. In the House resolutions of the New Hampshire and Maine legislatures condemning nullification were referred to a special five-man committee. On January 17 Adam L. Bingaman of Adams County submitted the majority report approved also by Benjamin F. Stockton of Claiborne and Tilghman M. Tucker of Lowndes. The report was unsparingly critical of South Carolina, upbraiding that state for having acted with "reckless precipitancy." Although expressing an opinion that the tariff of 1828 was contrary to the spirit of the constitution, the committee

[34] Washington *Globe,* January 18, 29, 1833, quoting Natchez *Mississippi Journal; Speech of Rob't J. Walker, Esq. Delivered at the Union Meeting, Held in the City of Natchez, on the First Monday of January, 1833* (Natchez, 1833); Gwin to Donelson, January 6, 1832 [1833], Donelson Papers.

[35] Quitman to Howard, January 14, 1833, Nathan G. Howard Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

[36] *Mississippi House Journal,* 16 Sess. (January, 1833), 17.

majority proposed that Mississippi peremptorily reject the "disorganizing doctrines recently promulgated in South Carolina."[37]

On January 23 Representatives Francis Richardson of Wilkinson and David McRae of Greene presented a minority report recommending in effect that the legislature adopt a course of neutrality by refusing to sanction or condemn either the course of South Carolina or the President's proclamation. The two legislators urged that the protective tariff be repealed and that the principles of the Virginia and Kenutcky Resolutions be reaffirmed. Although the committee was divided three-to-two on this issue, the mood of the whole House was considerably more hostile to nullification. On January 24 it adopted the majority report by a vote of thirty to three. Only Speaker David Pemble of Amite joined McRae and Richardson in opposition.[38]

In the Senate the opponents and supporters of nullification were more evenly matched. On January 28 Senator John I. Guion of Warren presented a committee report suggesting that Mississippi extend to South Carolina "the sympathy due to an oppressed and suffering sister." Guion declared that he did not countenance South Carolina's course but expressed the belief that her motives were pure. Nevertheless the Senate approved, without a recorded division, the House resolution denouncing South Carolina's action. Senator George Higgason of Lowndes also introduced one resolution praising the President's proclamation and another demanding Senator Poindexter's resignation, but neither measure passed. On March 2, the last day of the session, the proposal seeking Poindexter's ouster, which had been approved by the House, was defeated in the Senate by a tie vote. Both houses adopted a resolution disapproving Georgia's call for a convention of the states on the grounds that such a convention would probably confirm the disputed powers of the federal government.[39]

Although the enactment of the Compromise Tariff of 1833, providing for a gradual reduction of duties, removed nullification as a serious national question, the issue was kept alive in Mississippi for several months thereafter. During the gubernatorial campaign of May, 1833, Hiram G. Runnels, former state auditor, opposed the incumbent Abram M. Scott in a bitterly fought contest. Though less than two years earlier Runnels had hailed Calhoun's opinions "as the truly republican doctrines alone calculated to save the Union," he denounced the "wild heresies of nullification" and criticised the governor for his neutral course during the previous legislative session. Runnels won by the narrow margin of 6,675 to 6,117. It would be equally dangerous to credit Runnels' vic-

[37] Natchez *Courier,* January 11, 1833; *Mississippi House Journal,* 16 Sess. (January, 1833), 74-76.

[38] *Mississippi House Journal,* 16 Sess. (January, 1833), 111-15, 127.

[39] *Mississippi Senate Journal,* 16 Sess. (January, 1833), 27, 32, 66-69, 77, 192; *Mississippi Session Laws,* 16 Sess. (January, 1833), 246-52.

tory to his aggressive campaign against nullification or to suggest that Scott's vote indicated that almost 48 per cent of the Mississippi electorate were sympathetic to that cause. Nullification was not the sole issue and Scott received considerable support from the Adams-and-Clay forces who preferred him to Runnels, the avowed partisan of Jackson. Nevertheless the Clinton *Mississippian* interpreted the incumbent's attempt to disassociate himself from the extreme State Rights party as an indication that "the signs of the times are . . . strikingly unpropitious to nullification."[40]

Within two months after the election Governor Scott lay dead, a victim of cholera. Charles Lynch, president of the Senate, became acting governor and delivered the opening message to the legislature in November, 1833. Critical of the course of South Carolina, he regretted that "the heresies of Nullification and Secession have found their advocates in many of her distinguished, but misguided citizens." In his own inaugural address Runnels was even more outspoken in his denunciation of "the dangerous remedy of Nullification."[41]

The State Rights Party of Mississippi was actually more active in 1834 than in 1833. By February of that year four presses in the state were pledged to that cause. Senator Poindexter had urged his followers to continue to strive for the acceptance of their views on the nature of the Union. In October, 1833, he warned that if the "new and extravagant principles" of the President's Nullification Proclamation were universally accepted, "the day is not distant when it [*sic*] will be applied to the whole south, on a subject equally delicate and important." He considered that the only security for slave property "consists in the unbending firmness with which the fundamental axiom is maintained, that a law of Congress, which departs from the sphere of delegated powers, is 'neither supreme or binding on the States, or the people.' "[42]

On January 11, 1834, the "friends of State Rights and State Remedies" held a meeting in the State Capitol to establish an organization "for the purpose of defending the rights of the States and maintaining the Federal Constitution." A committee headed by John A. Quitman recommended the selection of delegates for a statewide State Rights convention to be held in Jackson. The convention met on May 19. During its three-day sessions the delegates, approximately forty men from ten counties, formed a "State Rights Association" and issued an address

[40] Runnels to Poindexter, October 18, 1831, in Woodville *Republican,* March 30, 1833; Natchez *Gazette,* April 6, 1833; Monticello *Gazette,* March 16, 1833, quoting Clinton *Mississippian.*

[41] *Mississippi House Journal,* 17 Sess. (November, 1833), 27-28, 55-56.

[42] Edwin A. Miles, "The Mississippi Press in the Jackson Era," *Journal of Mississippi History,* XIX (January, 1957), 10; Poindexter to Charles C. Mayson, October 20, 1833, in Grand Gulf *Advertiser,* February 24, 1834.

to the people of Mississippi, an elaborate historical defense of nullification emanating from the pen of Chancellor Quitman.[43]

By the spring of 1834, however, the issue of nullification was of little interest to most Mississippians. At that time the most controversial issue in the state as well as in the nation concerned President Jackson's removal of the public deposits from the Bank of the United States. As a result hostility towards "executive usurpation" rather than opposition to "consolidation" became the rallying cry of the anti-Jackson forces of Mississippi.

Despite the quality of its leadership, the nullification movement in Mississippi failed to capture the imagination of the people. Although a majority of them were hostile to the tariff, that issue did not seem significant to a people who were enjoying "good times" and confidently expected them to continue. Governor Hiram Runnels considered it "an anomaly in the affairs of all well regulated governments, to see at a moment of general prosperity—at a moment when our external and internal relations are in the most happy state of existence; that we should be brought to a poise by State dissensions."[44] If the dispute concerning the nature of the Union had arisen from an issue more vital to Mississippians, for example, the question of slavery—the nullification movement in the state would probably have received greater support. But to most residents of Mississippi the most salient event of 1833 concerned neither the tariff nor nullification: in the autumn of that year the first public auctions of the Choctaw lands were held at Columbus and Chocchuma. Mississippians were grateful to Old Hickory for making these lands available to them and they were inclined to disregard differences of opinion that he might entertain on issues of less importance.

[43] Jackson *State Rights Banner,* January 24, 1834; Woodville *Republican,* June 7, 1834; Vicksburg *Register,* July 31, 1834.

[44] *Mississippi House Journal,* 17 Sess. (November, 1833), 55-56.

CHAPTER VI

MR. BIDDLE'S BANK

> "All this, we owe to Jackson; for you he has fought every foe; for you he has conquered in every field; in the camp and the cabinet he has toiled for you; and it is time we should come to the rescue of him who flew to our rescue in the time of our utmost need."
>
> General Thomas Hinds[1]

In 1831, after several years' agitation, a branch of the Bank of the United States was opened at Natchez. There was little audible protest against its establishment; indeed, most Mississippians eagerly welcomed the advent of additional banking facilities to their expanding state. Both opponents and supporters of the national administration had urged the state General Assembly to petition the Bank to create the subsidiary institution. Believing that its establishment would be to "the mutual advantage of the Community and the Bank" and desiring to "afford to the government every facility in collecting and disbursing its Revenue," the Bank directory acceded to the legislative request.[2]

But within a year the Bank of the United States had become one of the most controversial political issues in the nation. Nicholas Biddle, president of the Bank, decided to seek a renewal of its charter prior to the presidential campaign of 1832, although the existing charter did not expire until 1836. Having despaired of his plans to secure administration sponsorship of recharter, Biddle entertained the faint hope that President Jackson might hesitate to oppose this application during the campaign. Henry Clay, searching for an issue with which to capture the Presidency, encouraged Biddle's action.[3]

In Mississippi there was a decided predilection for the Bank among the planting and commercial interests of the river counties which benefited from the operation of the Natchez branch. Many leading members

[1] Address to the Democratic Convention at Jackson, June 9, 1834. Jackson *Mississippian,* June 13, 1834.

[2] Natchez *Statesman and Gazette,* July 11, 1829; Natchez *Southern Galaxy,* December 31, 1829; Natchez *Gazette,* October 20, 1830; Nicholas Biddle to the President of the U.S. Bank at Natchez, January 17, 1831, Claiborne Papers, Jackson.

[3] See Walter Buckingham Smith, *Economic Aspects of the Second Bank of the United States* (Cambridge, 1953), ch. 10; Bray Hammond, *Banks and Politics in America from the Revolution to the Civil War* (Princeton, 1957), ch. 13; Thomas P. Govan, "Fundamental Issues of the Bank War," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography,* LXXXII (July, 1958), 305-15.

of the Jackson party, including James C. Wilkins, president of the Planters' Bank of Mississippi, were known to favor an extension of the charter. "We know not whether the Jackson party in this part of the State be spurious or real," said the Vicksburg *Advocate and Register,* "but we do know that they are nearly if not entirely unanimous, in concurrence with the Clay and every other party, in the desire for the renewal of the charter of the United States Bank."[4]

The two Mississippi state banks, the Bank of the State of Mississippi —soon to become the Agricultural Bank—and the Planters' Bank, lent their support to the movement. On January 16, 1832, Biddle wrote Wilkins, suggesting "for your consideration whether the community or the Banks in your neighborhood would be disposed to cooperate with us." In accordance with Biddle's request, Wilkins secured resolutions from the directors of the two state banks endorsing the Bank's request for a recharter. The resolution of the Planters' Bank expressed the view that the Bank of the United States has "invigorated and extended the agricultural and commercial prosperity of our fellow citizens, and will accelerate the development of the varied resources of our State."[5]

It was soon plainly apparent that the enthusiasm for the renewal of the charter was confined to the counties adjoining the Mississippi River. Wilkins decided not to hold a public meeting at Natchez in favor of the Bank because of a firm conviction that this action would arouse the other parts of the state and "would have no beneficial effect." The residents of east Mississippi had little contact with the Bank and in a contest between Nicholas Biddle and Andrew Jackson their sympathies would be enlisted behind the Old Hero. Andrew Marschalk wrote Biddle in December, 1832, that "the majority of the population of this state, as it now stands opposed to the B[ank] are situated in the centre and eastern parts of the state." Franklin E. Plummer, the unquestioned spokesman of the piney woods, was at first impressed by the almost universal sentiment for the Bank in the river counties, but he opposed the recharter when it finally came to a vote in order "to please the folks at home."[6]

Of the Mississippi delegation in Congress only Senator George Poindexter sustained the bank in its fight for recharter. As early as January, 1831, Samuel Smith wrote Biddle that it was "barely possible" that the Mississippi senator would favor the Bank's application. At that time Smith told Biddle that Poindexter would soon go to Philadelphia "for a cure of his weak legs, when you will see him of course." In December, 1831, in a report to Biddle on the probable Senate reaction

[4] Natchez *Natchez,* March 9, 1832, quoting Vicksburg *Advocate and Register.*
[5] Biddle to Wilkins, January 16, 1832, Wilkins to Biddle, February 25, 1832, Sturges Sprague to Biddle, February 23, 1832, Biddle Papers, Library of Congress.
[6] Wilkins to Biddle, February 11, 1832, Marschalk to Biddle, December 22, 1832, Biddle Papers; Hamilton and Nuermberger, "Claiborne's Memoranda," 151.

to a memorial for a new charter, Thomas Cadwallader listed Poindexter as "not certain," but noted that "he is soured with the Prest." When the bill for the recharter of the Bank passed the Senate in June, 1832, Poindexter voted with the majority; and he later supported the unsuccessful attempt to override Jackson's veto.[7]

The coupling of the Bank recharter with the presidential campaign of Henry Clay in 1832 was a death blow to the cause of that institution in Mississippi. So hopeless were the Kentuckian's chances in the state that no electoral ticket committed to his support was presented to the voters. James K. Cook, editor of the *Natchez* and a warm advocate of the "American System," was disheartened by the "supineness of the friends of Mr. Clay," and proposed an electoral ticket pledged to a recharter of the Bank. As electors he suggested Chancellor John A. Quitman of Adams County, Judge Cotesworth P. Smith of Wilkinson, Thomas Land of Yazoo, and General Wiley P. Harris of Pike. Quitman and Smith, however, declined to serve because of their deep-seated anxiety regarding the tariff and nullification; Land refused on the grounds that such a ticket "would be bringing the Bank directly into the field . . . against the present Administration, and would be directly fixing upon it the most serious of the charges made against it, that of its being made use of as a political engine"; and General Harris also spurned the offer. Sadly disappointed, Cook abandoned his scheme of organizing a Bank electoral ticket. "If we are to judge by the last Presidential election, of the strength of the Bank party in this State," he wrote two years later, "it must be very small; for the opposition to President Jackson was so weak, that an electoral ticket could not be got up against him of any kind—and the *attempt* to get up a *Bank electoral ticket,* was hooted at."[8] In the election of 1832 the nominees of the Democratic-Republican national convention, Jackson and Van Buren, won easily in Mississippi over a hastily formed ticket pledged to Jackson and Philip P. Barbour of Virginia.

Although immediately following the election of 1832 the Bank issue was overshadowed by the national crisis over the tariff and nullification, it was not altogether forgotten. President Jackson soon determined to weaken Biddle's position in the fight for a renewal of the charter by discontinuing the practice of committing the federal funds to the custody of the Bank and its branches. As early as December, 1832, Senator Poindexter wrote Biddle that he was considering a resolution to forestall a withdrawal of the deposits, but that he first wanted to be sure of its

[7] Smith to Biddle, January 27, 1831, Cadwallader to Biddle, December 23, 1831, Biddle Papers; *Register of Debates,* 22 Cong., 1 Sess., 1073. "Soured" is misread as "sound" in Reginald C. McGrane (ed.), *The Correspondence of Nicholas Biddle Dealing with National Affairs, 1807-1844* (Boston, 1919), 153.

[8] Natchez *Natchez,* August 10, September 7, 21, 1832; Washington *Globe,* April 7, 1834, quoting Natchez *Standard.*

success. At the same time the Mississippian requested an extension of a loan from the Bank; and Biddle promptly responded that he was "much gratified at being able to apprize you that the arrangement you wish has been authorized."[9]

During the summer of 1833 Jackson made plans to consign the federal revenue to selected state banks throughout the Union. He elevated Secretary of the Treasury Louis McLane to the State Department because of his reluctance to issue such an order; and he dismissed his successor, William J. Duane, for his refusal to do so. Finally the President found in former Attorney General Roger B. Taney a Secretary of the Treasury willing—and eager—to assist in his plan to weaken the Bank. In September Taney announced that henceforth the federal government would no longer avail itself of the facilities of the Bank of the United States for the deposit and transference of its funds.

Faced with the loss of the government deposits, Nicholas Biddle and the directors of the Bank of the United States inaugurated a policy of contraction. While many of the deposit or "pet" banks—as administration foes called them—rapidly increased their accommodations in anticipation of the federal funds, the Bank of the United States and its branches curtailed discounts, called in outstanding loans, and demanded the redemption of state bank notes by the institutions that issued them. Although Secretary Taney defended his removal order partly on the ground that the Bank should begin liquidating its affairs prior to the expiration of its charter, Jacksonians criticised Biddle for adopting measures consistent with such a policy. By early 1834 there was a fairly widespread panic in many parts of the nation. While defenders of the President charged that Biddle was sowing the seeds of financial distress in order to force a restoration of the deposits, opponents of Jackson imputed the panic to the removal order itself. The President's precipitate action afforded the National Republicans and a portion of the Nullifiers, together with a faction of hitherto loyal Democrats hostile to the presidential ambitions of Vice President Van Buren, an issue upon which they could unite as opponents of executive usurpation. In 1834 this coalition adopted the time-honored name of the Whig party.

Prior to the removal order, President Jackson learned from his old friend, United States District Judge Powhatan Ellis, that both the Planters' Bank and the Agricultural Bank of Natchez would be willing to serve as depositories for federal funds in Mississippi. Consequently on October 9 Secretary Taney designated the Planters' Bank as one of the nation's deposit banks. "The deposites of the public money," he wrote to the directors of the Natchez bank, "will enable you to afford increased facilities to the commercial and other classes of the community;

[9] Poindexter to Biddle, December 26, 1832, Biddle to Poindexter, December 28, 1832, Biddle Papers.

and the department anticipates from you the adoption of such a course respecting your accommodations, as will prove acceptible [*sic*] to the people and safe to the Government."[10]

The directors of the Planters' Bank soon learned that its designation as one of the "pet" banks was not an unmixed blessing. In 1833 the price of cotton was high and the banks of Mississippi were generous in the extension of accommodations. During the autumn, record land sales at Chocchuma and Columbus, where speculators abounded, attracted substantial capital from other parts of the Union but also put a considerable premium on funds within the state. By the end of the year "great moneyed pressure" existed in Mississippi.

Simultaneously with the announcement of the selection of the Planters' Bank as a depository for federal funds, the registers of the land offices in Mississippi were instructed to send the proceeds from the land sales to that bank. In anticipation of these funds the directors of the Planters' Bank, "expecting that they would receive them in available funds, and being much pressed by the necessities of the country, proceeded to discount much more freely than they otherwise would have done."[11]

Communication between the land offices and the bank, however, was slow-moving and at first only a small trickle of government funds flowed into the coffers of the bank. As late as November 27, the total amount of federal money in its custody was only $13,771.89; on December 26, the sum was $68,271.89. Then suddenly the deposits began to pour in at a prodigious rate: within five days the sum reached $781,156.17. By February 12 the figure was $1,068,515.76[12]

To their dismay, the directors discovered that the influx of government deposits merely compounded their difficulties. Only a small percentage of the funds was in United States Bank notes or specie; a vast amount was in the paper of banks in Tennessee and Alabama, while the largest portion consisted of notes issued by the Planters' Bank itself—a state of affairs resulting from the fact that the registers exchanged United States Bank notes at a premium for the paper of the state banks. Such proceedings, said the directors, injured the bank "very seriously, by depriving us of a fund which would tend to keep down our balance with the United States' Bank, throwing on our hands unavailable funds, and

[10] White Turpin to Ellis, May 15, 1833, Ellis to Jackson, July 2, 1833, Jackson Papers; Washington *Globe,* October 9, 1833; Taney's instructions as quoted in Samuel Gustim [Gustine] and others to Taney, January 25, 1834, *Senate Documents,* 23 Cong., 1 Sess., II, No. 136, 3.

[11] Samuel Gustine to Taney, January 25, 1834, *Senate Documents,* 23 Cong., 1 Sess., II, No. 136, 3.

[12] *Senate Documents,* 23 Cong., 1 Sess., I, No. 16, 6; II, No. 86, 125-128; V, No. 272, 210.

withdrawing a large portion of our distant and valuable circulation, and returning it upon us."[13]

To add to the woes of the Planters' Bank, the branch of the Bank of the United States at Natchez, in compliance with the general policy of contraction, began reducing its discounts. Between December 5, 1833, and January 9, 1834, it called in over $982,334 of its accommodations. This policy made it increasingly difficult for the Planters' Bank to maintain its balance with the branch bank without a drastic curtailment of its activities and at the same time it perceptibly increased the pressure on the state bank for more liberal accommodations. To this latter unprecedented urgency the Planters' Bank yielded. Between November 13 and January 29 it increased its discounts by $2,330,773.[14]

Consequently the directors of the bank were "startled" upon receiving a circular from the Secretary of the Treasury, issued on December 13. At that time Taney informed all deposit banks that the public money in the Bank of the United States was almost exhausted and that the deposit banks should "hold themselves in readiness to meet the various requisitions upon them by the ordinary business transactions of the Treasury." A committee of the directors, headed by Samuel Gustine, wrote Taney that "we were not prepared to receive a general notice of the kind, especially at so early a period, when we had hardly received the deposites, much less had time to discount on them, and call in our discounts, so as to meet the warrants or drafts."[15]

In view of this alarming situation the directors humbly entreated for "the most liberal indulgence extending toward us which is compatible with the public interest." Since the deposits in the bank were entirely the proceeds from the sale of public lands within Mississippi, they urged that the administration "let them remain for the assistance of the people of this State, where they sprung from, until they are exhausted by the expenditures of the Government in this and the adjacent sections of country." They particularly requested that they be not compelled to transmit funds to New York. If it became necessary for them to honor a large draft requiring northern funds, the directors said, "it would embarrass us very much to supply the funds, and, at the same time, save our customers."[16]

In reply Secretary Taney assured the directors that he had no intention of transferring their deposits to the eastern cities and stated that they would be "for the most part disbursed for the removal of the Indians, or other expenditures to the West." But at the same time he cautioned the directors, reminding them that the amount of deposits in

[13] Samuel Gustine to Taney, January 25, 1834, *ibid.*, II, No. 136, 4.
[14] Washington *Globe*, March 7, 1834; Jackson *Mississippian*, April 19, 1834.
[15] Gustine to Taney, January 25, 1834, *Senate Documents*, 23 Cong., 1 Sess., II, No. 136, 3-4.
[16] *Ibid.*, 4.

their institution was "much larger" than in any of the other western banks. "I cannot, however, too strongly impress on the Bank," he warned, "the necessity of keeping itself always in a position to meet every demand of the Government." Taney informed the directors that the Bank would be required by June 1 to transfer $500,000 to the Union Bank of Louisiana at New Orleans, where the funds would be "more convenient for disbursements for Government expenditures."[17]

Before Taney's gentle admonition reached Mississippi, the panic had descended upon the state with paralyzing effect. During the week of February 12-19, the Planters' Bank received demands for the payment of $682,000 worth of notes that it had issued. Within a short time reports circulated throughout the nation that Mississippi's "pet" bank was on the verge of insolvency.[18]

The panic struck terror into the hearts of speculators and politicians in Mississippi. "The times here are very bad," Seargent S. Prentiss of Vicksburg wrote his mother. "The mad course of the President has caused more ruin in the country than was ever known before. Money at present, seems to have taken to itself wings, and unless there is some change shortly, two-thirds of the people of this county will fail." "Even the warmest friends of Jackson are crying aloud for a recharter of the U.S. Bank," Isaac Caldwell wrote Senator Poindexter. "We have no local news; all eyes are fixed on Washington; what can be done for our Salvation?" Among the "warmest friends of Jackson" who condemned the President's fiscal measures were James C. Wilkins and Robert J. Walker. "We have undergone a complete revolution," said Wilkins, president of the Planters' Bank. In a letter to Senator John Black, Walker declared that "the public voice demands restoration of the deposites, and the creating of a bank to supply the general currency." Charles E. Wilkins of Natchez assured Poindexter that "the Gen-eral[']s popularity is done for in this county and I believe in the State." Throughout Mississippi public meetings were held to express disapproval of the administration's course of action.[19]

In Washington Senator Poindexter appeared to assume an air of righteous self-satisfaction at the news of the distress among his constituents. In February, commenting on reports that the panic had not yet affected Mississippi, he declared that "I am happy to hear that it is so," but at the same time he warned that "her day of reckoning is to come,

[17] Taney to the President and Committee of the Planters' Bank of Mississippi, February 19, 1834, *ibid.*, 5-6.

[18] Washington *Globe,* March 28, April 1, 1834.

[19] Prentiss (ed.), *A Memoir of S. S. Prentiss,* I, 139; Caldwell to Poindexter, January 29, 1834, James C. Wilkins to Poindexter, March 14, 1834, Charles E. Wilkins to Poindexter, March 5, 1834, Claiborne Papers, Jackson; Walker to Black, March 1, 1834, in *Niles' Register,* XLIX (October 10, 1835), 92; Woodville *Republican,* March 1, 1834; Vicksburg *Register,* March 5, 26, May 1, 1834; Jackson *Mississippian,* March 28, 1834.

and may not be far distant." One month later, in a letter to Felix Huston, a director of the Planters' Bank, he observed that events had justified his wearisome campaign against the tyranny of Jackson. "Now that ruin must be the inevitable result of the recent measures of the executive on the great planting and commercial interests of Mississippi," he wrote, "I indulge the hope that their eyes will at length be opened, and that my course will be properly appreciated."[20]

Poindexter himself did little to allay the panic in his state. He charged on the floor of the Senate that the Treasury Department had demanded $1 million from the Planters' Bank for the benefit of eastern banks, a statement hardly calculated to enhance the waning prestige of the hard-pressed Natchez bank. The administration vigorously denied the allegation, for which there seems to have been no basis in fact. In retaliation the Jacksonians maintained that Poindexter and Biddle were allies in an attempt to undermine the credit of the Planters' Bank. The Louisville *Advertiser* asserted that the Bank of the United States was determined to subvert the deposit banks and that it had selected the Planters' Bank "as the Western 'pet' best fitted for such an experiment." "Now, how did Mr. Poindexter know that the *day of reckoning* for Mississippi was 'to come' and was 'not far distant?'" asked Francis P. Blair. "Is there any oracle which could so accurately predict results, except the power which brings them to pass? Is not that power, in this case, Mr. Biddle's secret committee in Philadelphia, the gods of the money temple, of which Mr. Poindexter is the high priest?"[21]

Poindexter indeed remained in close contact with Biddle throughout the session and was a conspicuous leader in the fight for the restoration of the deposits. (The *Globe,* for example, called it "the partisan war which Messrs. Clay, Webster, Poindexter, and others, have waged for the Bank.") On December 23 Biddle wrote the Mississippian, urging Senate rejection of the government directors of the Bank renominated by Jackson. "They have . . . set themselves in opposition to the rest of the Board," Biddle wrote, "and if they are confirmed, it will be construed by them as a triumph—a triumph which the Kitchen Cabinet ought not to be allowed to enjoy." In compliance with Biddle's suggestion, Poindexter vigorously advocated the rejection of the Bank directors, although he subsequently told his colleagues that "he had never written a line to any Director in the Institution, concerning the Bank itself, or its management; and never had he received, from any one interested in the Bank, a request that he would give his vote in favor of the charter of

[20] *Register of Debates,* 23 Cong., 1 Sess., 498; "Letter from George Poindexter to Felix Huston [March 9, 1834]," *Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society,* IV (1901), 331-33.

[21] Fitzpatrick (ed.), *Autobiography of Martin Van Buren,* 745; Washington *Globe,* March 1, April 1, May 20 (quoting Louisville *Advertiser*), 1834.

the Bank, or in any way interfering with the concerns of the Institution."[22]

Poindexter also supported the motions of censure against the President and the Secretary of the Treasury adopted by the Senate. "We are all delighted," Biddle wrote, "at the energy with which you are carrying on the war against these miserable people in power." When Jackson's message protesting the censure was presented to the Senate on April 17, the Mississippian arose to move that it not be received by that body. It was, he charged, a "foul effort to cast a stigma on the purity and patriotism" of the Senate. He would "throw back the libel into the hands of its reckless, infatuated author." Poindexter's resolution was approved by the Senate and the President's message was not entered on the journal. "The whole country is under great obligation to you for your prompt and bold movement against the Protest," Biddle exulted. "Rely upon it, the Senate is now the popular branch of the Government, and if you will only stand by the Constitution, the people will stand by you."[23]

In February, 1834, Francis P. Blair divulged in the columns of the *Globe* the previous financial relationship between Poindexter and the Bank of the United States. Apparently acting upon information obtained from a government director, he disclosed that a note for $10,000 drawn in Poindexter's favor in May, 1832, had not been protested when it became due the following January; instead Poindexter was able to have a new note of $8,000 discounted, while his first was still unpaid—a violation of one of the Bank's regulations. Blair contended that both transactions were fictitious; that the Bank was compensating Poindexter for his political support.[24] The correspondence between Biddle and Poindexter indicates that the Mississippi senator obtained considerable favors from the Bank, but none in the form of gratuities.

Following the revelation of his earlier transactions with the Bank, Poindexter became even more frequent in his requests for accommodations. In the spring of 1834 he devised arrangements for a removal of his own deposits—from Natchez to Philadelphia, where he felt that they would be "more convenient to answer my purposes." He proposed and Biddle acquiesced in a plan whereby the Bank of the United States would advance him the necessary funds to conclude the transfer—a transaction involving more than $100,000—to be repaid when notes owed Poindexter in Mississippi became due. Biddle also agreed to an immediate loan of $6,500 to meet the senator's present exigencies. "I beg of you to excuse the trouble I give you in this matter," Poindexter

[22] Washington *Globe,* February 10, 22, 1834; Biddle to Poindexter, December 23, 1833, Biddle Papers.

[23] Biddle to Poindexter, February 22, April 30, 1834, Biddle Papers; *Register of Debates,* 23 Cong., 1 Sess., 1336-40, 1711-12.

[24] Washington *Globe,* February 10, 1834.

wrote, "and to be assured that I duly appreciate the friendly dispositions which you have manifested towards me."[25]

For once a majority of the Mississippi delegation in Congress joined Poindexter in opposition to the administration. Senator John Black, elected for a full senatorial term in December, 1833, announced shortly afterwards that he would vote for a restoration of the deposits. The Jacksonian leaders in Mississippi were particularly embittered at Black's unlooked-for desertion so soon after his election. They remembered that he had been a "red-hot Jackson man" in 1832 and had once descended from the judicial bench to deliver "a little phillipic against Mr. Poindexter." "He went to Washington your devoted friend," William M. Gwin wrote the President, "was elected two months after the removal of the Deposites was never known to breath[e] an objection to their removal but no sooner did he take his seat but he became as vindicative in his votes as Poindexter who I have heard him over & over denounce in the most bitter terms."[26]

In the House, Harry Cage, elected as a Jacksonian and serving his first session in Congress, also renounced the President's banking policies and condemned the removal of the deposits as "totally uncalled for." "I hope it is not the wish of the people of Mississippi that I should become a mere automaton," said Cage, in language strongly reminiscent of Poindexter, "and surrender my judgment and what I believe to be their best interests at the shrine of party." "A saucy black-eyed southerner he is," Anne Royall described Franklin E. Plummer's colleague, "but U.S. Bank up [to] his ears."[27]

During the early days of the "panic session" it was rumored that Representative Plummer would also join the coalition against the President. His stand against the Force Bill had alienated the Jacksonian leaders in Mississippi. Hiram Runnels, the Democratic governor, was a long-time political enemy. But at a time when many former supporters of the administration were abandoning it, Plummer gave his unqualified approval to the President's war against the Bank and declined to join the "new-coined whigs."[28]

The Mississippi congressman regarded the Bank question as a struggle "between the aristocracy and democracy," and denounced not only Biddle's "golden harlot," but all banks as well. He supported the removal of the deposits "because he was opposed to all licensed monopolies, to the conferring of exclusive privileges on any man or corporation

[25] Poindexter to Biddle, June 14, 1834; Biddle to Poindexter, June 10, 19, 1834, Biddle Papers.

[26] Washington *Globe,* November 19, 1834; Gwin to Jackson, August 9, 1834, Jackson Papers.

[27] Jackson *Mississippian,* March 7, 1834; Washington *Paul Pry,* August 9, 1834.

[28] Washington *United States Telegraph,* March 29, 1834, quoting Richmond *Whig; Register of Debates,* 23 Cong., 1 Sess., 4826.

of men." In his war on the Bank, the President was advocating "the principles of the workingmen of the country, therefore did he support him; whenever he abandoned those principles he was in honor bound to his constituents to abandon him."[29]

The workingmen of the country! Plummer, at odds with all major political factions, sang the praises of the workingmen's parties of the Atlantic seaboard—the representative of a southwestern agricultural state advocating the principles of eastern urban radicals. These parties, which at times held the balance of power in such cities as New York and Philadelphia, endorsed a wide program of reform: universal suffrage, no property qualifications for office, direct election of all officials, complete separation of state and religion, abolition of monopolies, an ad valorem system of taxation, and the discontinuance of imprisonment for debt and capital punishment. There was no laboring class of any appreciable strength in Mississippi, but Plummer, himself the son of a mechanic, apparently hoped that in the program of the workingmen's parties he could find a platform upon which to unite the small landholders of Mississippi under his leadership. According to him, a man might be a "working-man in principle" without being a mechanic or laborer; "he might be a lawyer, a physician, a merchant or a planter." The "workingmen of Mississippi" were those "who stand opposed to the aristocracy, whether composed of birth, of wealth, of office, of learning, or of talents."[30]

On May 26, 1834, Plummer delivered what has been termed "probably the most radical speech delivered by a Westerner in Congress during Jackson's presidency." He declared that there are "but two interests in society—one subsisting by industry and the other by law." The vast majority of the people belonged to the first or major class. But the minor class controlled the affairs of the nation and shared the "honors and emoluments of the Government," while the great mass of the people, "who pay the fiddler and other expenses of carrying on the operation, have not even a solitary chance in the game."[31]

All of the principal political factions of the nation were segments of the minor class. But there was no principle underlying their controversies. "It is a mere question about men," Plummer complained. "It is a private quarrel between the ins and outs." At that time the parties were engaged in a protracted struggle over the presidency. The followers of Clay, Calhoun, and Webster had joined forces in attacking

[29] *Register of Debates,* 23 Cong., 1 Sess., 3309-11.

[30] *Ibid.,* 4834-36; for a general account of the workingmen's parties consult Foster Rhea Dulles, *Labor in America, a History* (New York, 1949), 35-62.

[31] Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Age of Jackson* (Boston, 1945), 132-43; *Register of Debates,* 23 Cong., 1 Sess., 4828-29. Plummer derived the concept of the two interests in society from the writings of Stephen Simpson and John Taylor of Caroline. See Miles, "Franklin E. Plummer," 21 n.

the administration, but the Whig coalition was doomed to failure because of the conflicting ambitions of its leaders. Each faction had seized upon the Bank question as an issue upon which to rise upon the downfall of the administration. The Democratic party, another division of the minor class, was no better. Its members supported the President's attack upon the Bank not because of any hostility toward monopolies, but because they hoped that the issue would elevate Van Buren, their favorite, to the presidency.[32]

Thus none of the major political organizations had any real concern for the interests of the major class. What then could be done about the situation? Plummer proposed that the workingmen of the nation disregard the partisan disputes over men and unite to fight for principles. They must support the President's policy against the Bank. He thought it "a favorable omen to the working-men that the administration has been compelled, in order to shield itself from the battering rams of the other discordant fragments of the minor class, to seek protection behind their principles." As for his own course of action Plummer announced that "I will not go against the [Jackson] party until the party goes against the principles of the working-men."[33]

Many Mississippians were puzzled by their representative's condemnation of the administration while approving its major policies, and the state "Regency" hardly knew whether to praise or censure him. But Plummer's strength among the rank and file of the voters was enhanced. Buckner Harris, after reading his first speech against the Bank, wrote that it "will make him beat *hell in his prime* here. I have no doubt he can beat any man in Mississippi for any office whatever. His speech is read in every company—you can hear the *piney woods fellows* say well done our little Plummer." "Plummer is infinitely stronger now than ever," reported the leading Democratic journal in the state.[34]

Plummer's spirited defense of the removal of the deposits stood in striking contrast to the shilly-shally attitude of most Democratic leaders in the state. Even the Jackson *Mississippian* expressed the opinion that the action "might have been delayed." In May, it was conceded at a Democratic rally in Hinds County that "some of the warmest supporters of the administration" had regarded the move as "somewhat *ill-timed*." "Hell is broke loose below," Samuel Gwin wrote Governor Runnels. "The Banks are determined to kill old Hickory. No friend of his can be accommodated in the Banks." But Gwin, unlike many of his political associates, was optimistic. *"That['s good!!!"* he added. "It will all come out right."[35]

[32] *Register of Debates,* 23 Cong., 1 Sess., 4827, 4830-31.
[33] *Ibid.,* 4822, 4831.
[34] Harris to John Black, May 1, 1834, quoted in Vicksburg *Register,* April 23, 1835; Jackson *Mississippian,* June 20, 1834.
[35] Jackson *Mississippian,* March 7, 1834; Vicksburg *Register,* May 22, 1834;

As spring progressed the Democratic party in Mississippi slowly regained its lost morale. The Planters' Bank, with invaluable assistance from the Girard Bank of Philadelphia, weathered the storm that had threatened to destroy its credit. On April 10 director Felix Huston reported that "we have stood the shock of unmerited slander, and the malice of enemies."[36] Nicholas Biddle subsequently yielded to business protests against his policy of contraction and once again discounted liberally. Many a Mississippian who a few months earlier had faced impending bankruptcy now breathed a sigh of relief.

Encouraged by the recovery from the panic, the Democratic leaders in Mississippi became more unreserved in their defense of the President's policy. George R. Fall, English-born editor of the Jackson *Mississippian,* exhibited the way for the party by presenting the banking issue as a sectional one within the state. (Both James C. Wilkins and Andrew Marschalk had warned Biddle of this possibility in 1832.) Fall called Natchez "the Bank Citadel" and declared that "democracy has more foes in Natchez than in every other part of the State combined." "You need not dread the influence of Natchez politicians—" wrote a correspondent of the *Mississippian,* "this state cannot be ruled, as it once was, by the nabobs of Natchez, who live in palaces and loll in coaches, who coax and cajole a poor fellow when they want an office, and turn their backs and pass on the *other side of the street* when they have got it." One resident of Gallatin denied that pro-Bank resolutions adopted at a recent local meeting reflected the political views of the community. "What, Copiah County governed by old Nic. Biddle and his stiff backed agents in Natchez?" he asked. "We Piney Woods boys are not to be bought up like cotton. We are poor, very poor, but the *Bank* has not got enough money to buy us."[37]

On May 1 a Democratic rally in Jackson issued a call for a statewide party convention to meet in early June. Preparations were hastily made throughout the state for public meetings to elect delegates. As usual Samuel Gwin—"the Mississippi agent of the Kitchen Cabinet," according to Duff Green—was active. He procured thousands of copies of the President's protest and arranged for their distribution throughout the state. He also dispatched letters to friends in the newly organized Choctaw counties, urging them to hold meetings and submitting proposed resolutions defending the President's course of action.[38]

Gwin to Runnels, March 19, 1834, Governor's Papers, Series E. No. 27, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

[36] Washington *Globe,* April 1, 1834; Huston to editor of Louisville *Journal,* quoted in Washington *Globe,* May 20, 1834.

[37] Jackson *Mississippian,* March 7, April 12, May 9, July 4, 1834.

[38] Vicksburg *Register,* May 22, 1834; Jackson *Mississippian,* May 30, 1834; Washington *United States Telegraph,* June 26, 1834; Gwin to William Fanning, May 26, 1834, in Washington *National Intelligencer,* August 23, 1834; R. H. Sterling to Andrew Jackson Donelson, May 25, 1834, Donelson Papers.

Approximately sixty delegates from eleven Mississippi counties attended the Democratic convention, which met in Jackson on June 9. General Thomas Hinds, Jackson's old comrade in arms, presided and called upon those present to rally behind Old Hickory. The delegates approved resolutions opposing the Bank, supporting the removal of the deposits, denouncing Poindexter, Black and Cage, and praising Plummer. They also chose twenty-four delegates to the Democratic convention scheduled to meet in Baltimore the following year.[39]

While the Democratic party in Mississippi was closing ranks behind the President, his opponents in that state were taking steps to unite under the banner of the Whig party—the name that had been adopted by the coalition against "King Andrew." For a time the alliance of the National Republicans and the State Rights party was delayed by the tactics of the latter faction, which endeavored to keep alive the dying issue of nullification long after the public had lost interest in it. At the May State Rights convention the delegates, although denouncing the removal of the deposits, disclaimed any intention of organizing a pro-Bank party. In Washington Senator Black was discouraged by the reluctance of the Mississippi Nullifiers to enlist in the Whig crusade. He considered the President's assumptions of power in the Bank controversy far more serious than his action in the nullification crisis. He chided Chancellor John A. Quitman for acting "like those who would insist on defending the outwork of a fortress after it had been passed [and] carried and a violent assault [is] going on against the main fortress itself." In a public letter to his constituents he outlined the issue as one between the executive prerogative and the legislative power. To the senator the proper course of action was a simple matter to decide: "I consider it one of whig or no whig."[40]

The union of the National Republicans and the Nullifiers in Mississippi was consummated at a meeting of the opponents of the administration held in Natchez on June 18. Adam L. Bingaman, one of the leaders of the old Adams-and-Clay (National Republican) party, presided, while Quitman, a Nullifier, and James C. Wilkins, who had maintained prior to 1834 a precarious dual loyalty both to the President and the Bank, participated prominently in the proceedings. The gathering passed resolutions censuring the President and endorsing a recharter of the Bank, whose management was declared to possess a "purity and financial ability unsurpassed." Those present recommended a statewide convention of the Whig party to be held in Jackson in December.[41]

In joining forces Bingaman, Quitman, and Wilkins—Mississippi's "Whig triumvirate"—subordinated their constitutional disagreements to

[39] Jackson *Mississippian*, June 13, 1834.

[40] Vicksburg *Register*, May 29, June 12, 1834; Black to Quitman, June 3, 1834, quoted in Hearon, "Nullification in Mississippi," 61.

[41] Vicksburg *Register*, July 3, 1834.

their common conservatism on economic matters. Nevertheless Quitman entertained serious misgivings about the union to which he had lent his name. A few weeks later he wrote a political associate that the newspapers had erred in representing him as having supported all the resolutions. "I addressed the meeting on the second resolution [against the removal of the deposits]," he explained, "and before the resolution in relation to the Bank was brought forward. *To it I was opposed and voted against it.*"

Moreover Quitman asserted that "no man can be more opposed than I am to a political union with the Nationals, or any other set of men opposed to State Rights." "I believe further," he said, "that the real national Republicans or Federalists are further removed from us than any other politicians. . . . I begin to think that a deep game is about to be played in which principle has no part. I begin to think that we should stand aloof. If the Nationals have hoped to make use of us, be assured they are mistaken. We are not compromitted." But significantly Quitman professed his apprehensions in a private letter rather than in a public announcement explaining his relationship to the Whig coalition.[42]

In Washington Senator Poindexter, Quitman's fellow Nullifier, experienced no uneasiness in joining the new party. To honor him for his zeal in opposition to the administration, the Whig majority chose him, in June, 1834, to be president *pro tempore* of the Senate. The Jacksonians were furious. Not only was the smouldering animosity between Poindexter and Jackson well known, but the Mississippian was one of two Senators—Calhoun being the other—who were not on good personal terms with Vice President Van Buren. The Democrats regarded his election as an attempt to "disgrace the Chair, in which Mr. Van Buren has been placed by the People of the United States." One administration scrivener scurrilously said: "This man . . . yet rank with the fumes of a low debauch, his step yet tottering, and his eyes rolling with a drunken leer, this man, all filth and vermon [*sic*], called, probably, from a brothel or a gin cellar, to the Senate Chamber, this man, they chose . . . to preside over the Senate of the United States."[43]

The ill will between Jackson and Poindexter did not abate during the congressional recess; indeed it was intensified. While en route to Mississippi, Poindexter's stagecoach overtook that of the President at Martin Baker's tavern in Gordonsville, Virginia. Although he had not yet eaten breakfast, the senator, upon seeing the Old Hero "surrounded by stage drivers and hostlers in the portico of the hotel," declined to leave

[42] Quitman to Ferdinand Leigh Claiborne, September 5, 1834 (copy), Quitman Papers.

[43] Fitzpatrick (ed.), *Autobiography of Martin Van Buren*, 749; Washington *Globe*, June 30, 1834; Washington *United States Telegraph* (tri-weekly), July 18, 1834, quoting New York *Evening Post*.

the coach. Jackson, much amused at his enemy's discomfort, offered to reimburse the tavernkeeper for the loss of Poindexter's patronage. "I will indemnify you for the loss," he reportedly said, "and [will] pay you in better coin than he paid his wife, whom he induced to marry him by a promise of twenty thousand dollars, and her dowry has been stripes." "It was very cruel in you," Vice President Van Buren, who soon heard about the meeting, wrote his chief, "to deprive poor Poins of his breakfast." In his retirement Jackson loved to tell visitors to the Hermitage of the Gordonsville incident.[44]

Although the *rencontre* was a "source of much amusement" to the friends of Jackson, Poindexter was outraged when he heard versions of the President's remarks to the innkeeper. In a letter to the editor of the Baltimore *Patriot,* he wrote: "If the assertion made by Mr. Jackson, was as true as it is ridiculously false that I induced my wife to marry me by a promise of twenty thousand dollars as her dower—I have at least the consolation to know that I did not steal her from the lawful owner!! perhaps Mr. Jackson may understand the illusion[*sic*]." "This infamous libel on me, as a private gentleman," he declared, "calls for a reply which cannot be made in this communication." Harriet Martineau, who visited Washington during the following winter, heard reports that Poindexter intended to challenge Jackson to a duel after his presidency had ended.[45]

When Poindexter returned to Mississippi in September, 1834, the political climate had radically changed since his last visit there almost one year earlier. No longer did men wear the political labels "Nationals," "Nullifiers," or "Jackson Men"; these designations had been superseded by "Whig" and "Democrat." The issue that had brought about this revolution had been the Bank of the United States.

The effects of the removal of the deposits and Biddle's counter measures were probably felt as profoundly in Mississippi as in any other state. Over a million dollars in proceeds from the sale of public lands were placed in the custody of a newly organized bank, which yielded to the "great moneyed pressure" in the state by a reckless extension of accommodations. When the Bank of the United States began a curtailment of its activities, the Planters' Bank's financial position was imperiled. During the brief but alarming panic of 1834 Mississippi appeared to rally to the support of the national Bank in the controversy over the deposits: public meetings denounced the President's action;

[44] Washington *United States Telegraph* (tri-weekly), September 5, October 31, 1834; Washington *Globe,* October 31, 1834; Van Buren to Jackson, July 22, 1834, in Bassett (ed.), *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson,* V, 275; William Allen Butler, *A Retrospect of Forty Years, 1825-1865* (New York, 1911), 123-24.

[45] William B. Lewis to Van Buren, July 19, 1834, Van Buren Papers, Library of Congress; Poindexter to editor of Baltimore *Patriot,* quoted in Washington *United States Telegraph* (tri-weekly), October 25, 1834; Harriet Martineau, *Retrospect of Western Travel,* 3 vols. (London, 1838), I, 270.

many of his former supporters joined in the condemnation; and a majority of the state's congressional delegation opposed the administration.

Nevertheless with the passing of the panic Mississippi reaffirmed its ancient allegiance to Old Hickory. Biddle's policy of contraction had failed to win a restoration of the deposits, but to some it had given credence to Jackson's charges that the "Monster" possessed extraordinary and dangerous powers over the nation's economy. In Washington Representative Plummer vigorously supported the President's action and in Mississippi the Jacksonian leaders finally shook off the lethargy that had seized them during the panic. The warmest advocacy of the administration was manifested in the interior counties of the Pearl River and the piney woods, where local party leaders succeeded in capitalizing upon the hostility towards Natchez and the river counties by representing the Bank issue as a sectional one.

Despite the failure of the Bank to win the endorsement of a majority of Mississipians, the issue led to the creation of an opposition party, the Whigs, which for the first time offered a genuine threat to Democratic supremacy within the state. The new party received its most uniform support from the planting and commercial interests of the river counties. It had the blessing of three of the state's members in Congress and controlled a vast majority of the newspapers and a sizable proportion of the wealth of the state. In George Poindexter Mississippi contributed one of the national leaders of the new party.

The first test of Whig strength in Mississippi would be the senatorial election for the seat then held by Poindexter, whose term of office expired on March 3, 1835. His selection as president *pro tem.* of the Senate had redoubled the determination of the Jacksonian leaders in the state and nation to bring about the defeat of the "senator of lofty bearing." "The Kitchen Cabinet must think it a matter of no little importance to defeat the election of Mr. Poindexter," said Duff Green in July, 1834, "or they would not bring the President into the field against him."[46] The campaign promised to be a vitriolic one. But whom would the Democrats choose as Poindexter's opponent?

[46] Washington *United States Telegraph* (tri-weekly), July 8, 1834.

CHAPTER VII

THE JACKSON STAR

> "[Walker] wavered a little on the Deposite Question as did some of your best friends. They could not anticipate upon the wise & timely attack of the 23rd the glorious victory of the 8th. But Mr. Walker is now one of your most devoted friends."
>
> William M. Gwin[1]

It hardly seemed likely, in March, 1834, that Robert J. Walker would be the choice of the Mississippi Democracy to oppose Senator George Poindexter in his bid for re-election. Not only had he written Senator John Black urging a restoration of the deposits, but he had also publicly denounced the President's financial policies in the manner of an "irreclaimable whig." According to one report, he had declared in the presence of sundry witnesses that "in the removal of the deposites, Gen. Jackson had usurped powers totally foreign to the Constitution—that the act amounted to little less than idiotism—that it would ruin the country—that Gen. Jackson had proved himself a fool & a tryrant." He was apparently inexorably resolved to cast off the oppressive yoke of Jacksonism; and on one occasion he allegedly "tore his stock from his neck, with the exclamation that 'that d—d collar had been too tight for him for some time.' "[2]

Walker's desertion from the Democratic ranks seriously jeopardized a political career that had been assiduously sustained through fulsome adulation of the Old Hero. For more than ten years he had "supported Andrew Jackson for the presidency, with a zeal and devotion equal to that with which a crusader ever started upon his pilgrimage to the Holy Land."[3] The beginning of his crusade for Old Hickory antedated his residence in Mississippi.

Robert John Walker was born in Northumberland, Pennsylvania, in 1801, the son of Jonathan Walker, a distinguished state and federal jurist. Educated at the University of Pennsylvania, he graduated at eighteen with "the first honor of his class, unrivaled and undivided." After studying law in the Philadelphia office of state Chief Justice William Tilghman, he was admitted to the bar. In September, 1821, he

[1] Gwin to Jackson, August 9, 1834, Jackson Papers.

[2] *Niles' Register,* XLIX (October 10, 1835), 93; Vicksburg *Register,* September 25, 1834, December 24, 1835; Rodney *Telegraph,* October 23, 1839, quoting Vicksburg *Whig.*

[3] Jackson *Mississippian,* September 12, 1834.

opened a law office in Pittsburgh, where his father was federal district judge.[4]

During the following years the young attorney was less attentive to law than to politics. As chairman of the Democratic Young Men of Allegheny County he thrust himself into prominence as a leader in the Jackson movement in Pennsylvania. In November, 1823, he was the guiding spirit in organizing a meeting at the Pittsburgh Court House to endorse the candidacy of Old Hickory. The two hundred persons present adopted a Walker-sponsored resolution calling for a statewide convention to further Jackson's pretensions to the Presidency.[5]

The proposal for such a convention was enthusiastically received throughout the Keystone State and the Jackson partisans met in Harrisburg on March 4, 1824, to choose presidential electors and issue an address to the people of Pennsylvania. Walker, not yet twenty-three years old, served on the committee to draw up the address and is reported to have been its actual author. According to one contemporary, Walker did "as much, if not more, than any other man in the western country [of Pennsylvania] to support the cause of Jackson & the people." One associate wrote that he had wielded his pen "with greater strength, and if I mistake not, with greater effect, than any other person in this State, who entered the lists in favor of [General Jackson]." Twenty years later another writer declared that "at the early age of twenty-two, we find Mr. Walker, the acknowledged leader of the Democracy of . . . Pennsylvania, in the mighty movement which terminated in the election of Andrew Jackson to the Presidency."[6]

Walker's conspicuous rank in the Jackson movement was probably a handicap in his own race for the state General Assembly in 1824. The proponents of Crawford, who possessed considerable strength in western Pennsylvania, treated his candidacy with derision. "The Walker faction," said one Crawford adherent, "wish everything to be said and done, in the name of Jackson—in the hope that the *military* fame of the general may carry his disciples into office, against the better judgment of the people." "Bobby Walker," who was urged to "tarry in Jeric[h]o until his beard has grown," was described as a "young man, scarce yet arrived at the years of discretion" and as "an apostate federalist, who

[4] Two important sources of Walker's early life are an autobiographical address in the Jackson *Mississippian,* September 25, 1835, and an anonymous article, "Robert J. Walker," in the *United States Magazine and Democratic Review,* 43 vols. (Washington, 1837-1850), XVI (1845), 157-65. See also Pittsburgh *Statesman,* September 21, 1821.

[5] Pittsburgh *Statesman,* November 25, 1823.

[6] Washington *National Intelligencer,* March 13, 1824; Pittsburgh *Allegheny Democrat,* September 28, 1824; Natchez *Statesman and Gazette,* July 3, 1828; Jackson *Mississippian,* September 25, 1835; "Robert J. Walker," *Democratic Review,* XVI (1845), 157. See also Philip Shriver Klein, *Pennsylvania Politics, 1817-1832, a Game without Rules* (Philadelphia, 1940), 120-21.

changed to the democratic party to gain popularity." Although the "Jackson Star" (as his opponents contemptuously called him) failed in his first quest for political office, Jackson's victory in Pennsylvania during the following month requited amply for his own personal defeat.[7]

In later years Walker never found occasion to regret his early championship of Old Hickory: it was a distinct political asset upon which he capitalized throughout his long public career. "It is now more than seven years," he told a Natchez audience in 1830, "since I had the honor to propose to a public meeting of the Democracy of Pennsylvania, the name of Jackson as a candidate for the Presidency." The Pittsburgh meeting of November, 1823, became a recurring theme in Walker's political orations; and almost with each passing year he waxed bolder in his representation of its significance in the Jackson movement. In 1833 he referred to it as "the first meeting of a portion of the democracy of Pennsylvania"; two years later he described it as "the first *democratic* meeting . . . out of Tennessee, in favor of Genl. Jackson's election to the Presidency"; and in 1844 he wrote the Old Hero that "it is now more than twenty years, since I had the honor to present your name, for the Presidency, to the *first* democratic meeting in the Union."[8]

Despite Walker's prominence as a Jacksonian leader in Pennsylvania, the young lawyer was soon making plans to settle in the Southwest. His older brother Duncan, also an attorney, had already left Pittsburgh and had formed a law partnership with Edward Turner in Natchez. Judge Jonathan Walker, who had been in declining health for several months, also moved to Natchez, where he died in March, 1824. When Edward Turner was chosen a judge of the Mississippi Supreme Court in 1825, Duncan Walker invited Robert to come to Mississippi and join him in the practice of law.

Although Walker was virtually penniless upon his arrival at Natchez in the spring of 1826, he was not without influential friends in the new region. In addition to his brother, there were Stephen Duncan, a cousin, a wealthy planter and president of the Bank of the State of Mississippi; the Minors, prominent in the early history of Louisiana and Mississippi, of Pennsylvania origin and soon to be related to the Walkers by marriage; and James C. Wilkins, another emigré from the Keystone State, a nephew of William Wilkins of Pittsburgh, an associate of Walker in the Jackson movement in western Pennsylvania. These, and others, were patrons of the young attorney in his early days in Mississippi.[9]

[7] Pittsburgh *Statesman,* August 21, October 2, 9, 1824; Pittsburgh *Allegheny Democrat,* September 28, October 5, 12, 1824.

[8] Natchez *Gazette,* October 20, 1830; *Speech of Rob't J. Walker, Esq., Delivered at the Union Meeting,* 8; Jackson *Mississippian,* September 25, 1835; Walker to Jackson, January 10, 1844, Bassett (ed.), *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson,* VI, 255-56.

[9] Claiborne, *Mississippi,* 415.

The junior partner of the firm of Walker and Walker quickly established himself as one of the leading members of the Natchez bar—"the first lawyer in the place," according to Seargent S. Prentiss, who studied in his office in 1829. After ill health forced the retirement of his older brother, Robert J. Walker formed a new partnership with John C. Potts. "Mr. Walker," wrote James D. Lynch, "was a lawyer of searching industry and his success at the bar was due in great measure to a careful and accurate preparation of his briefs." He served as reporter for the state Supreme Court and his compilation of the cases argued before that body prior to 1832 was published in 1834. Urging him to be a candidate for delegate to the constitutional convention of 1832, the Natchez *Gazette* declared that "it will be conceded by all that he is an accomplished lawyer, . . . endowed with forensic talents that would command for him an elevated standing in any deliberative assembly." When a separate federal circuit court bench for Mississippi and Louisiana was proposed in 1832, Walker was the overwhelming choice of the Mississippi bar for the post. According to Representative Franklin E. Plummer, President Jackson was prepared to offer Walker the judgeship, but Congress did not approve the necessary legislation.[10]

While Walker was distinguishing himself at the bar, he was not neglecting the political arena. He came to Mississippi armed with letters from Pennsylvania associates attesting to his unremitting exertions for the Old Hero during the campaign of 1824. Within a short time he became one of the most energetic leaders of the Jackson movement in Mississippi.

In 1826 Walker wrote a series of articles in reply to the charges of former United States Senator Jonathan Roberts of Pennsylvania that Jackson was incompetent to hold public office. These articles, which he signed "Vindicator," were first published in the Cincinnati *Republican* and later reprinted in Jacksonian presses throughout the nation. In noting the first of the series, the editor of the Washington *United States Telegraph* declared it to be "in reasoning, what Jackson was in fighting at New-Orleans—irresistible." Walker's praise of Jackson was boundless: "Nature has stamped upon him the seal of moral and intellectual preeminence, and combined in his remarkable character more energy, virtue and patriotism, with more prudence, foresight and judgment, than have ever coexisted in any of our distinguished citizens excepting only the father of his country."[11]

[10] Prentiss (ed.), *A Memoir of S. S. Prentiss*, I, 94; Natchez *Gazette*, October 26, 1831, March 15, 1832; James D. Lynch, *The Bench and Bar of Mississippi* (New York, 1881), 111; Robert J. Walker (comp.), *Reports of Cases Adjudged in the Supreme Court of Mississippi, June, 1818-December, 1832* (Natchez, 1834); Robert H. Buckner to John A. Quitman, January 8, 1832, Plummer to Quitman, March 5, 1832, Claiborne Papers, Jackson; "Robert J. Walker," *Democratic Review*, XVI (1845), 159.

[11] Washington *United States Telegraph*, September 12, 1826; Natchez *States-*

Walker secured the publication of the "Vindicator" articles in the Cincinnati *Republican* because there was no newspaper in Mississippi then pledged to Jackson's support. In order to provide a more accessible outlet for his political writings Walker was one of the principal organizers of the Jackson Association that established the Natchez *Statesman* in December, 1826. When it was proposed that such a newspaper be published, the names of Walker and Dr. Samuel A. Cartwright, "both of whom are as well known abroad as at home, to be men of abilities," were suggested as editors. Although the *Statesman* and its successor, the *Statesman and Gazette,* were officially edited by an anonymous committee of the Jackson Association, Walker and Cartwright were its most industrious contributors.[12]

Prior to Jackson's brief visit to Natchez in January, 1828, Walker was selected—along with Major General Samuel L. Winston and Major Henry Chotard, two veterans of the Louisiana campaign—as a delegate to the celebration of the thirteenth anniversary of the Battle of New Orleans. In the "Crescent City" Walker delivered on behalf of the citizens of Natchez a brief grandiloquent oration to the Old Hero. "I was particularly struck," said one observer, "with the language as well as the manner of Mr. Walker, who delivered the Natchez address."[13]

During the next few years Walker emerged as the foremost orator of the Jackson party in Mississippi. In October, 1830, he was chosen as the principal speaker at the Natchez dinner celebrating the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek. In January, 1833, he delivered the address at the anti-nullification meeting held in the same city. This latter oration won the speaker acclaim outside Mississippi. Former President James Madison read it and allegedly declared that Walker was the first person who had given what he considered "the true view of Mr. Jefferson's language on that subject." James R. Gilmore was so impressed by it (or perhaps by the orator's account of it) that he later wrote that "Mr. Walker and General Jackson scotched the snake, Nullification."[14]

Until 1834 Walker was a vigorous champion of Jackson and the measures of his administration. In 1828 and 1832 he served on Demo-

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man and Gazette, February 22, 1827. Walker revealed his authorship of the "Vindicator" series during his campaign for the United States Senate in 1834. Jackson *Mississppian,* November 7, 1834. The articles were reprinted in the Natchez *Statesman and Gazette,* February 22-April 12, 1827.

[12] Natchez *Newspaper and Public Advertiser,* November 29, 1826; Jackson *Mississippian,* November 7, 1834; Miles, "The Mississippi Press in the Jackson Era," 2-4.

[13] Natchez *Statesman and Gazette,* February 7, 13, 1828.

[14] Natchez *Gazette,* October 20, 1830; *Speech of Rob't J. Walker, Esq.; Delivered at the Union Meeting;* Natchez *Mississippi Free Trader and . . . Gazette,* September 16, 1836, quoting Washington *Globe;* James Robert Gilmore, *Personal Recollections of Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War* (Boston, 1898), 17.

cratic-Republican committees of correspondence in both Mississippi and Louisiana. In addition to his advocacy of the President's course on Indian removal and nullification, he supported his public lands policies and the veto of the bill to recharter the Bank of the United States. In the language of the day, he was considered "*'democratic'* to the backbone."[15]

Walker's residence in Mississippi led to a marked change in his views on the tariff. In iron-producing Pennsylvania the young attorney who was to become the author of the revenue tariff of 1846 had been a staunch advocate of protection. In February, 1821, he wrote that "the members of Congress who in opposing the tariff would toll the funeral knell of domestic manufactures will not succeed"; and in one of his earliest public speeches, delivered on the Fourth of July of the same year, he had urged the "necessity of placing our domestic industry beyond the reach of foreign competition." Even after his removal to Mississippi he allegedly told an acquaintance that "he was astonished how any one could doubt the constitutionality or expediency of the tariff."[16]

But after four years in the agricultural Southwest, Walker's opinion regarding the tariff had been modified. In 1830 he advocated a reciprocal trade policy and the following year he was chosen a delegate to the Free Trade Convention in Philadelphia (although he did not attend). In 1833, while vigorously opposing nullification, he expressed his emphatic opposition to the protective tariff.[17]

Although by 1834 Walker was a recognized leader of the Jackson party in Mississippi, he had held no political office. Several times he had been mentioned as a possible candidate: for the Supreme Court in 1829 and for representative and senator in 1830; but he had never actually sought a public office. An outstanding member of the Natchez "Junto," he had supported Thomas Hinds for representative in 1828, Robert H. Adams for senator in 1830, and James C. Wilkins in his unsuccessful bid for a congressional seat that same year. By 1830 his prominence as a member of the "Junto" would have been a liability if he had chosen to become a candidate in a statewide race. Although familiarly acquainted with the lawyers and politicians throughout Missis-

[15] Jackson *Mississippian,* September 12, 1834; Vicksburg *Register,* September 25, 1834.

[16] Walker to Samuel B. Wylie, February 24, 1821, quoted in Frank Herschel Tick, "The Political and Economic Policies of Robert J. Walker" (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of California at Los Angeles, 1947), 11; Pittsburgh *Mercury,* July 25, 1821; Hamilton and Nuermberger, "Claiborne's Memoranda," 150.

[17] Natchez *Gazette,* October 20, 1830, September 21, 1831; *Speech of Rob't J. Walker, Esq., Delivered at the Union Meeting,* 16.

sippi, he was but little known, as late as 1834, among the electorate outside his own county.[18]

As the years passed, law and politics consumed less of Walker's energies and talents, for the Natchez attorney soon joined many of his fellow Mississippians in hazardous business ventures in lands and slaves that characterized the era of the "Flush Times." His flourishing law practice and his friendship with Duncan, Wilkins, and other men of wealth in Natchez enabled him to amass sufficient capital to invest heavily in the purchase of sugar and cotton plantations, slaves, and land to hold for speculative purposes. In addition to his investments in Mississippi, he acquired lands in Louisiana and Arkansas, and, upon the death of his brother, certain properties in Texas.[19]

In 1833 Mississippi provided the scene for the most ambitious speculative undertaking that Walker had yet conceived. In the autumn of that year the lands ceded by the Choctaw Indians under the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek went on sale at public auction at Columbus and Chocchuma. Before October 21, the date set for the Chocchuma auction, Walker and a few associates formed a company to acquire lands to hold for resale. Walker arranged for a survey of a portion of the former Choctaw lands prior to the sales so that his company would have advance knowledge of the value of the sections to be auctioned.

When the speculators arrived at Chocchuma, they discovered another group from Alabama with intentions similar to their own. There were also several "squatters" who had come with intentions of buying the lands on which they had settled and made improvements. For awhile it appeared that competition would force the price of land upward, but the two groups of speculators merged forces and formed the Chocchuma Land Company.[20]

To reduce competition between the pioneers and the speculators Walker suggested that the company first purchase the settlers' land and then resell it to them at cost. Walker was delegated to broach the proposition to the squatters, most of whom readily agreed to the plan. Throughout the sales he worked long hours arranging for the affairs of the settlers. With competition at a minimum most of the land sold for $1.25 per acre, the lowest possible price.[21]

[18] Woodville *Republican,* December 12, 1829; William L. Sharkey to John A. Quitman, March 9, 1830, Claiborne Papers, Jackson; *Mississippi House Journal,* 13 Sess. (January, 1830), 18-19; Natchez *Statesman and Gazette,* May 29, 1828; Natchez *Gazette,* July 14, 1830; Hamilton and Nuermberger, "Claiborne's Memoranda," 142.

[19] Claiborne, *Mississippi,* 415; Richmond *Enquirer,* April 16, 1844; *Congressional Globe,* 24 Cong., 1 Sess., 245; Hamilton and Nuermberger, "Claiborne's Memoranda," 142; Woodville *Republican,* January 3, 1835, March 5, 1836.

[20] *American State Papers,* 38 vols. (Washington, 1832-1861), *Public Lands,* VII, 454.

[21] *Ibid.,* 476; Gordon T. Chappell, "Some Patterns of Land Speculation in the Old Southwest," *Journal of Southern History,* XV (November, 1949), 474-77.

Although the agreement between the squatters and the speculators led to reduced proceeds for the federal government, it was an arrangement highly satisfactory to most of those present. Walker, who was honored by the settlers at a public dinner at the conclusion of the auction, defended his own large purchases of land. He was merely exercising "a privilege that is common to every other citizen, that of purchasing a portion of the soil of the country for whose freedom my father toiled . . . in the war of the Revolution." At the same time, he was identifying his own fortunes with the "future growth and prosperity of Mississippi."[22]

Thus by 1834 Walker found himself deep in the "sea of speculation." He had acquired vast properties, but he had borrowed money and gone heavily in debt to make his purchases. In addition, he had endorsed several notes for friends. When the panic of 1834 struck, he foresaw inevitable bankruptcy before him. On February 28 the commission house of Wilkinson, McNeill & Company, which had advanced him considerable funds, failed and he was called upon for the immediate discharge of his obligations to that firm.[23]

Walker's financial difficulties led to his desertion—temporarily at least—from the Jackson ranks, for he joined James C. Wilkins, Harry Cage, John Black, and other former supporters of the administration in denunciation of the removal of the deposits. On March 1 he wrote Senator Black declaring that "Mississippi will, with great unanimity, sustain you on the deposite question. . . . Go on your constituents are with you: the country must be relieved from the frightful scenes of distress which have ruined us!!!" He reportedly told his friends that should he "live 60 years, he would employ the whole period in an effort to atone to the country for the injury he had done it in aiding to elevate Gen. Jackson to the Presidency."[24]

Walker soon regretted his headstrong decision to oppose the Old Hero. Although several years elapsed before he completely freed himself of pecuniary embarrassments in Mississippi, the passing of the panic of 1834 temporarily eased his plight. But the political prospects of the "Jackson Star" were considerably dimmed by his outspoken condemnation of the removal of the deposits.

During the summer of 1834 further light was focused on Walker's speculative activities at Chocchuma. Poindexter, anxious to strike back at an old enemy, charged that Samuel Gwin, register of the Chocchuma Land Office, had been in league with the speculators to defraud the

[22] *Ibid.*, VIII, 744.

[23] Walker to editor of Port Gibson *Correspondent,* October 17, 1839, Port Gibson *Correspondent,* November 8, 1839.

[24] *Niles' Register,* XLIX (October 10, 1835), 93; Vicksburg *Register,* December 24, 1835.

government and to take advantage of the settlers. "Old Poins" was appointed chairman of a senatorial committee to probe the alleged frauds.[25]

Whatever the basis for Poindexter's allegations, the investigation was conducted in a highly unjudicial manner. His enemies protested vehemently when he selected two well-known antagonists of Gwin to obtain depositions from witnesses in Mississippi. On the other hand, the senator charged that the postal authorities hampered the probe by delaying or mishandling his correspondence with the agents of the committee. Tempers flared between the partisans of Poindexter and the supporters of Gwin and on one occasion Samuel B. Marsh, one of the senator's closest associates, shot and fatally wounded Thomas Nixon, a friend of Gwin, on the streets of Chocchuma. In defense of his activities Gwin, who complained that the investigators sought testimony only from his enemies, forwarded several counter depositions to Missouri's Senator Thomas Hart Benton.[26]

Although the main target of Poindexter's investigation was Gwin, it was inevitable that Walker's name would be involved in the testimony. One deponent charged that the agreement arranged by Walker between the speculators and the settlers prohibited the latter from bidding on any land except that which they had already improved. When this deposition was published in the Port Gibson *Correspondent,* Walker determined to seize the occasion not only to issue a stirring defense of his character but also to regain his former standing in the Jackson ranks.

Walker's address to the "People of the United States," dated August 4, 1834, was a skillful document. He produced the charter of the Chocchuma Land Company to refute the charge that the settlers had been intimidated by the speculators. He boasted of the services that he had rendered the squatters. Other speculators were planning to bid for the lands upon which the settlers had made improvements. "I found," Walker wrote, "the emigrant surrounded by wife and children, who, with him, looked forward to the public sales as the probable period which was to expel them forth again into the wilderness, without a roof to shelter or a home to protect them." His feelings had been "warmly enlisted in their behalf."[27]

Walker further declared that political considerations had motivated the attack upon his personal character. "The partisan editor of the Port Gibson Correspondent," he asserted, "has thought proper to designate me as occupying 'a conspicuous station in the Jackson ranks.' This

[25] *American State Papers, Public Lands,* VII, 448.

[26] *Ibid.,* VIII, 747, 761; Washington *United States Telegraph* (tri-weekly), June 25, 1834; Vicksburg *Register,* September 11, 1834; William M. Gwin to J. F. H. Claiborne, November 10, 1878, Claiborne Papers, Chapel Hill.

[27] Walker's address was reprinted in *American State Papers, Public Lands,* VIII, 739-45.

unfolds the true secret of the attack upon my private character by George Poindexter and his supporters here." Walker produced several affidavits from "gentlemen, I believe, without an exception, opposed to me in politics" to disprove "this tale which is introduced with such solemn pomp by George Poindexter into the Senate of the United States." In vain did Poindexter later assert that he had never mentioned Walker's name in connection with the alleged frauds: Walker successfully represented himself as one whose reputation had been maliciously slandered by the senator.[28]

The effect of the address was almost electric. It not only restored Walker to the good graces of the party but it immediately thrust him into prominence as a possible Jacksonian candidate to succeed Poindexter, whose term of office expired in March, 1835. William M. Gwin called the document "one of the best productions of the kind I have ever read." "Robert J. Walker's pamphlet is every where read," one Democrat jubilantly wrote. "People from all quarters of the state are writing for it. It will put down Mr. Poindexter."[29]

To be sure, there were other Democratic aspirants eager to enter the lists against the "senator of lofty bearing." As early as September, 1833, Franklin E. Plummer had been referred to as possible candidate, but the representative was unacceptable to the Gwins and other state leaders who enjoyed the confidence of the President. Henry S. Foote was willing to make the race, but he had lived in Mississippi only three years and had already gained a reputation for political instability that retarded his advancement throughout the eighteen-thirties. Samuel Gwin likewise had been a resident of the state for only a brief period. Other persons mentioned as likely candidates were Governor Hiram Runnels and General Thomas Hinds.[30]

William M. Gwin, recently appointed United States marshal, was one of the first to recognize Walker's potentialities as the adversary of "Old Poins." "Mr. Walker I am confident will be the opposing candidate," he wrote Jackson in August. "He that hates Poindexter . . . worse & whom he has attempted to injure most is the strong man with us." Gwin assured the President that he need not fear the incumbent's return to the Senate. "If elected he will have to walk over the dead bodies of *three* persons before he takes his seat. Mr. Walker, my brother & myself he has used every effort to destroy. If we can not disgrace him by beating him he shall atone for his attacks upon us by his blood."[31]

[28] Vicksburg *Register*, September 4, 1834.

[29] Gwin to Jackson, August 9, 1834, Jackson Papers; Jackson *Mississippian*, September 5, 1834.

[30] Washington *National Intelligencer*, September 9, 1833; William M. Gwin to Andrew Jackson Donelson, September 19, 1833, Donelson Papers; Washington *United States Telegraph*, June 27, 1834; Vicksburg *Register*, October 2, 1834; "Autobiography of William M. Gwin," Claiborne Papers, Chapel Hill.

[31] Gwin to Jackson, August 9, 1834, Jackson Papers.

Yet Walker himself needed to be convinced that his candidacy would be acceptable to the party. "He was in terrible agony," Gwin wrote later, "when Judge [George] Adams and I in the third story of Parker's Hotel [in Natchez], told him that we could make him the sole competitor of Poindexter. He wept like a child saying General Jackson would never forgive him and without the Old Hero's endorsement the Democrats of the State would not accept him."[32]

Gwin himself undertook to win the Old Hero's endorsement. "If any unfavorable impressions have been conveyed to you of Mr. Walker," he wrote on August 9, "dont believe it. He is a man of different calibre to Black & Cage. He differed with you as did Forsyth & King of Georgia but if I am your friend and ardent supporter he is." In a similar vein Richard M. Gaines assured the President that Walker was "now acting with his old friends, and with renewed energy and zeal." Although he had considered removal of the deposits an inexpedient policy at the time, Gaines wrote, "he now assures me that he considers it in every point of view, one of the wisest measures of the Government."[33]

There remained the task of arousing popular enthusiasm for Walker's candidacy and once again Poindexter unwittingly aided in the advancement of his rival's political fortunes. After his unpleasant encounter with the President at Gordonsville, Virginia, the senator proceeded via Louisville, Kentucky, to Mississippi, where his political associates had planned a series of public dinners in his honor. On August 26 the self-styled Nullifier was feted at Bell's Mansion House in Natchez, where several toasts were drunk to Henry Clay but none to John C. Calhoun. Four days later in Vicksburg the National wing of the Whig party was again conspicuous at the barbecue in the senator's honor. Shortly afterward Poindexter left Vicksburg for Raymond where the Whigs of Hinds County had scheduled a rally for him on September 4.[34]

In the Whig strongholds of Natchez and Vicksburg the Democrats made no attempt to cope with Poindexter, but they did not intend for him to go unchallenged in Hinds County, where the political parties were more evenly matched. The "Regency," anxious to capitalize upon the growing sentiment in Walker's favor, persuaded him to prepare a reply to the senator. Henry S. Foote, who had originally planned to respond to Poindexter, agreed to introduce Walker at the conclusion of the Whig rally.[35]

[32] Gwin to Claiborne, May 6, 1879, Claiborne Papers, Chapel Hill.

[33] Gwin to Jackson, August 9, 1834, Gaines to Jackson, October 16, 1834, Jackson Papers. In September Marshal Gwin and General Thomas Hinds visited the Hermitage where they assured the President that Poindexter was "politically dead" and probably pushed the claims of Walker as his successor. Jackson to William B. Lewis, September 14, 1834, in Bassett (ed.), *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson*, V, 291.

[34] Vicksburg *Register*, September 4, 11, 1834.

[35] Foote, *Casket of Reminiscences*, 218-19.

About five hundred persons "irrespective of party" assembled at the barbecue grounds near the Raymond courthouse to attend the dinner given in Poindexter's honor. For almost an hour and a half the "senator of lofty bearing" indulged in virulent invective against the administration; his colleague, John Black, spoke even longer in defending his course in opposition to Jackson. At the conclusion of Black's speech Foote ascended one of the tables and invited the gathering to assemble at the courthouse to hear Walker's reply. [36]

Walker's speech was an impassioned denunciation of Poindexter's senatorial career and a spirited defense of his own political views. He reprehended his adversary as one who had been elected to the Senate because of his promise to support the President, yet who became a "bitter and relentless foe of Andrew Jackson, . . . outstripping even Clay and Calhoun in the malignity of his assaults . . . , and as a reward for his abandonment of the people placed at the head of the American Senate, by that very majority which he had pledged to oppose." One by one he discussed the issues on which Poindexter had violated the will of his constituents—his opposition to the nominations of Samuel Gwin and Martin Van Buren, his support of Clay's distribution bill, his defense of nullification, and his championship of the Bank of the United States.

Concerning the Bank, Walker realized that in the minds of his listeners his own record was not untarnished. He admitted that he had considered removal of the deposits "unnecessary and inexpedient," but he had never questioned the power of removal. Furthermore, "upon a deliberate survey of the eventful scene which has passed before us," he was now "firmly convinced that the measure was highly expedient."[37]

Walker's speech—"a thrilling and powerful address" in the opinion of the Jackson *Mississippian*—fulfilled the fondest expectations of his political associates. Years later Henry S. Foote remembered it as "one of the most powerful political speeches I ever listened to"; J. F. H. Claiborne termed it "masterly" and noted that the orator dealt "in fierce invectives against the bank, though he had only recently whined over it as Sterne whined over his dead jackass."[38]

After the Raymond meeting the Democrats of nearby Jackson invited Walker to attend a dinner in that town on September 6. At the Jackson barbecue, John H. Mallory, the state auditor, proposed a toast to "our respected Guest, Robt. J. Walker, Esq: If virtue and talents be a recommendation for office, his election to the Senate of the U. S. is

[36] *Ibid.;* Jackson *Mississippian,* September 5, 1834.
[37] Jackson *Mississippian,* September 12, 1834.
[38] *Ibid.,* September 5, 1834; Foote, *Casket of Reminiscences,* 218-19; Claiborne, *Mississippi,* 416.

certain." Mallory's toast was the first public endorsement of Walker for the United States Senate.[39]

During the next month both Poindexter and Walker were honored at several barbecues throughout the state. During one week the senator attended dinners in four towns—Vernon, Woodville, Livingston and Canton. At Clinton, on September 15, both Poindexter and "the little man who has been following him about" were feted by their partisans. Three days later Poindexter spoke in Port Gibson and Walker addressed a gathering in Monticello. On September 20 the senator was in Fayette while his opponent was in Williamsburg. On his tour Walker was accompanied by Foote, then a candidate for state chancellor. "Almost every day," Foote later wrote, "he was assailed by some anti-Jackson speaker, and on every such occasion I defended him with such ability as I possessed." Walker and Foote were effective partners on the hustings.[40]

The "battle of the dinners" lasted until early October when Poindexter left Mississippi for the East. ("They would not eat his dinners," boasted Francis P. Blair of the *Globe*.) Soon afterwards Gordon D. Boyd of Wilkinson County wrote that the forthcoming senatorial election was "the great and almost all-absorbing topic which now agitates the public of this county." What was true of Wilkinson County was equally true of all Mississippi.[41]

Although Walker's tour established him as the leading Democratic contender for the Senate, his candidacy still required the approval of the party convention, which convened in Jackson on November 3. In spite of the party leaders' enthusiasm for the Natchez attorney, there was considerable opposition because of his embarrassing record on the deposit question. John B. Nevitt of Adams County was a leader in the movement to block the convention's endorsement of his candidacy; by a vote of 58 to 32, however, Walker became the first officially endorsed senatorial candidate of a statewide convention in Mississippi. J. F. H. Claiborne and Daniel W. Wright were nominated for Congress and Governor Hiram Runnels was supported for a second gubernatorial term.[42]

Franklin E. Plummer and his followers were displeased by the convention's action. Plummer, who had defended the President's removal of the deposits, was ignored, while Walker, who had denounced that action, was chosen as the party's senatorial standard bearer! Shortly after the convention adjourned it was announced that Plummer too would be a

[39] Jackson *Mississippian*, September 12, 1834, October 2, 1835.

[40] Vicksburg *Register*, September 25, 1834; Jackson *Mississippian*, September 26, October 10, 1834; Foote, *Casket of Reminiscences*, 219.

[41] Washington *Globe*, November 7, 1834; Woodville *Republican*, November 1, 1834.

[42] Jackson *Mississippian*, November 7, 1834; Edward Turner to John A. Quitman, November 5, 1834, Claiborne Papers, Jackson.

candidate for the coveted seat in the Senate. Robert J. Walker would have to be "wide awake," cautioned the Vicksburg *Register*.[43]

The convention also urged Governor Runnels to summon a special session of the legislature to meet in January, 1835; otherwise the senatorial election could not be held until one year later, ten months after the expiration of Poindexter's term. The "Regency" was sanguine of victory. Richard M. Gaines assured Van Buren that if a special session were called, "Poindexter will certainly be beaten, Black invited to resign, and Cage probably induced to quit politics in dignified disgust." The Democratic confidence resulted from the fact that sixteen new counties had been created since the last meeting of the legislature and it was well known that Walker possessed extraordinary strength among the settlers in the former Choctaw territory. Obedient to the wishes of his party, Governor Runnels announced a call for a special session and ordered writs of election to be issued for representatives from the new counties.[44]

In the meanwhile the Whigs were not inactive. On December 1 their convention in Jackson passed resolutions condemning the state Democratic leaders as tools of Van Buren, whose purpose was to make Mississippi "a colony of the State of New York." Unlike the Democrats, the Whigs made no formal nomination for senator. One of their leaders, John Henderson, a state senator from Wilkinson County, subsequently revealed the line of action that the Whigs would take during the special session. The Senate, which they controlled, would refuse to participate with the Democratic House of Representatives in the election of a United States Senator. Henderson conceded that such tactics would "produce a great excitement; but it becomes necessary."[45]

The Whig strategy was not without constitutional basis. The Democrats had urged the representation of the new counties because of the constitutional provision that each county should have at least one representative in the lower house. But another article stipulated that the number of senators should never be less than one-fourth the number of representatives. This ratio would be exceeded by the addition of sixteen new members to the House without any corresponding increase in the Senate. Furthermore there was a reasonable doubt concerning the eligibility of the new members until the next regular session of the legislature.

The legislature convened on January 19, 1835, and the following day the House voted to seat nine representatives from the new counties. The Senate, however, appointed a committee to determine whether the two

[43] Vicksburg *Register*, December 11, 1834.

[44] Gaines to Van Buren, October 20, 1834, Van Buren Papers; *Niles' Register*, XLVII (1835), 453-54.

[45] Vicksburg *Register*, December 25, 1834; Washington *United States Telegraph*, January 7, 1835; Woodville *Republican*, March 14, 21, 1835.

bodies meeting in session actually constituted the legislature of the state. On January 26 the majority report, which declared that the constitution had been violated in the seating of the new representatives by the House, was read and subsequently adopted. Three days later the Senate adjourned *sine die*.[46]

The House, which had already voted to meet with the Senate to ballot for a United States senator, condemned this action as a violation of the constitutional right of each house to judge the qualifications of its own members. Governor Runnels futilely protested the Senate adjournment, but he could do no more than recommend that the House do likewise, which it did on January 31.[47]

"We have raised a hornet's nest about our ears," John A. Quitman, president *pro tempore* of the Senate, confided to a friend. Indeed, the Whig strategy elicited angry protests from the Democratic press. Although the crucial senatorial election was thus postponed for twelve months—after the election of a new slate of legislators—the battle lines were already drawn. Walker's position as the Democratic standard bearer was strengthened by the Senate's postponement of the balloting. Poindexter issued a statement that "my public life is ended in Mississippi" and begged "my friends to turn their attention to some other individual better qualified than myself to serve them in the Senate"; but his advocates had no intention of abandoning him. Plummer's candidacy promised to add color and confusion to the canvass. The outcome of the campaign would be a test of Jackson's popularity in Mississippi and would perhaps foreshadow the presidential election of 1836. "One of the most angry and embittered contests ever known within our [national] borders"—as one contemporary later described it—was still to be decided.[48]

[46] *Mississippi House Journal* (1835), 12; *Mississippi Senate Journal* (1835), 52-62, 74, 93.

[47] *Mississippi House Journal* (1835), 108.

[48] Quitman to Judge [Edward Turner ?], February 5, 1835, Claiborne Papers, Jackson; Jackson *Mississippian,* February 6, March 13, 1835; Columbus *Democratic Press,* February 13, 1835; letter of George Poindexter, December 31, 1834, Washington *United States Telegraph,* March 16, 1835; A. De Puy Van Buren, *Jottings of a Year's Sojourn in the South or First Impressions of the Country and Its People with a Glimpse at School-Teaching in That Southern Land and Reminiscences of Distinguished Men* (Battle Creek, 1859), 261.

CHAPTER VIII

AN ANGRY AND EMBITTERED CONTEST

"I suppose you have seen General Jackson's letter. Glory!!"
Robert J. Walker[1]

Several weeks before the abortive legislative session of 1835, George Poindexter returned to Washington to resume his duties as president *pro tem* of the Senate. Wearily disheartened by the diminishing prospect of his re-election, he publicly announced his withdrawal "from the Councils of the Nation, at the close of the present session of Congress," and expressed the "earnest wish that my country may never again stand in need of my services."[2]

Despite this declaration of impending retirement, Poindexter was unable to retreat from the political strife in the nation's capital. In December, 1834, Vice President Van Buren displayed "unusual punctuality" in attending to his responsibilities as presiding officer of the Senate; in the past he had waited until that body had organized before he took his seat. Poindexter took offense at a statement in a Democratic journal congratulating the Vice President for preserving the presiding officer's chair from being "disgraced by that bloated mass of corruption —Poindexter." The senator asked for and received from Van Buren a statement that his action had not been prompted by any such motive. Although an immediate quarrel was thus avoided, Van Buren was certain that the Mississippian would soon seek an occasion to reopen the controversy. So "for the first and only time in my life," the Vice President later wrote, he carried a pair of loaded pistols on his persons until he was finally convinced that Poindexter had decided to drop the matter.[3]

On December 31, when Congress held a special memorial service for the recently deceased Lafayette, Poindexter caught his first glimpse of Jackson since their brief encounter at Gordonsville. Observing the President during John Quincy Adams' eulogy on the Revolutionary hero, the senator was reportedly touched by his adversary's frail appearance. "He looked a broken down—a worn-out man," Poindexter later declared, "and I said to a group of my friends, that henceforth I could feel nothing but pity for him—that I could regard any thing which

[1] Walker to John H. Mallory, August 31, 1835, in Jackson *Mississippian,* October 2, 1835.
[2] Poindexter to a "Friend in Wilkinson County," December 31, 1834, in Washington *United States Telegraph,* March 16, 1835.
[3] Fitzpatrick (ed.), *Autobiography of Martin Van Buren,* 758-61.

he could say against me, as nothing more than the brawling of oyster-women on the w[h]arf."[4]

Nevertheless one month later a new incident brought the relationship between Jackson and Poindexter to a new height of bitterness. As Jackson was leaving the Capitol on January 30, after attending the funeral of a member of the House of Representatives, a lunatic, Richard Lawrence (who claimed that Jackson and others had conspired to deprive him of his lawful inheritance to the English and American thrones!), attempted to fire two shots at the President but miraculously neither charge exploded. "This man," Jackson reportedly told bystanders who seized the would-be killer, "has been hired by that damned rascal Poindexter to assassinate me."[5]

In the meanwhile Poindexter, who had also attended the services, was returning to the Senate chamber. "Mrs. Poindexter, who had hold of my arm," he later recalled, "became alarmed at some indications of a disturbance which had arisen at a distance from us, and drew me towards the entrance into the Rotunda; on passing, I heard a sound which I took to be the crack of a coach whip, but urged on by my wife, I did not stop to inquire what had occurred to produce the agitation and excitement which drew the crowd in that direction." After reaching the Senate chamber, he was informed of the attempted assassination.[6]

When Poindexter heard the report that Jackson had accused him of conspiring with Lawrence, he immediately wrote the President requesting an avowal or disavowal of the statement attributed to him, but his letter was returned unanswered. When he learned that Jackson was soliciting depositions from persons who might associate him with Lawrence, he demanded a senatorial investigation so that "if found guilty, I may no longer disgrace the seat which I occupy in this body." The sworn statements of two Washingtonians who testified that they had seen Lawrence enter the senator's house on Four and a Half Street were thoroughly discredited. The Senate, without a dissenting voice, approved a committee report that "not a shade of suspicion" rested upon Poindexter in the Lawrence affair.[7]

Jackson accepted the verdict grudgingly. So did some diehard administration editors. While Francis P. Blair of the *Globe* conceded that "no suspicion justly attaches to Poindexter" in the affair, the Albany

[4] Washington *United States Telegraph,* March 29, 1835. See also *ibid.,* March 21, 1835, quoting Baltimore *Patriot;* and Woodville *Republican,* February 7, 1835.
[5] Washington *United States Telegraph,* February 2, March 21, 1835.
[6] *Ibid.,* April 13, 1835.
[7] *Ibid.,* March 21, April 13, 1835; Washington *United States Telegraph Extra,* February 28, March 14, 1835; Lyon Gardiner Tyler, *The Letters and Times of the Tylers,* 3 vols. (Richmond, 1884-1896), I, 509-11; affidavits of David Stewart, February 13, 1835, and Mordecai Foy, February 14, 1835, Jackson Papers, Second Series; *Register of Debates,* 23 Cong., 2 Sess., 582, 628-29, 714.

Argus declared that this meant only that "George Poindexter has yet one more point of degradation to descend to."[8]

On March 3, 1835, the day following his unanimous vindication, Poindexter's term of office expired. On that day he reviewed his senatorial career for his colleagues. "For five years he had stood on the floor of the Senate to defend, to the best of his poor ability and judgment, that glorious constitution which had been handed down to them by the wise and enlightened patriots who framed it." Yet he had seen "power progressively increasing, marching on, step by step, approximating to supreme authority." He himself had "experienced more than an ordinary share of the persecutions of power. . . . Every thing had been brought to bear on him, in order to create an ill feeling between him and his constituents."[9]

Following the adjournment of Congress, Poindexter did not immediately return to Mississippi. On March 27 the Whigs of Philadelphia lionized him at a dinner in the Chesnut Street Theatre, where he spoke to a partisan audience of over one thousand persons. He recalled the presidential conspiracy "to destroy my character, and hand down my name with infamy to posterity." "It is said to be a law of China," he continued, "that he who is convicted of the crime of slander, should, in addition to other penalties, be sentenced to have the house in which he resides painted black." He expressed the opinion that if the laws of the United States imposed such an appropriate penalty for willful denigration, "the splendid mansion which the people have erected for their Chief Magistrate, would not very long bear the complexion it now does."[10]

In May Poindexter was once again in Mississippi, where his Wilkinson County neighbors honored him at a dinner in Woodville. The former senator, still disclaiming any intention of being a candidate to succeed himself, declined other similar invitations in the state and declared that he would spend the summer in Virginia in the interest of preserving his health. At a barbecue given in his honor in Lexington, Kentucky, on July 11, he announced to his "fellow citizens of Lexington" (and to Henry Clay, who also attended) that "I have . . . retired to the shades of private life." But subsequent events were to demonstrate that Poindexter was not as eager for retirement as he professed to be.[11]

Representative Franklin E. Plummer returned to Mississippi in the spring of 1835 determined to wage a vigorous campaign for the

[8] Washington *Globe,* February 28, April 1, 1835; Woodville *Republican,* May 23, 1835; Columbus *Southern Argus,* June 20, 1835; Martineau, *Retrospect of Western Travel,* I, 272.

[9] *Register of Debates,* 23 Cong., 2 Sess., 739.

[10] Washington *United States Telegraph,* March 29, April 13, 1835.

[11] Woodville *Republican,* May 30, 1835; Vicksburg *Register,* June 18, 1835; *Niles' Register,* XLVIII (August 15, 1835), 427.

United States Senate. Embittered toward the "Regency" for its choice of Robert J. Walker as the Jackson standard bearer, he declared that he expected no favors "from the self-styled democrats, who combine together for the avowed purpose of securing 'the union and success of the great democratic party of the republic,' but for the real purpose of filling all the public offices." A principal object of his withering maledictions was Governor Hiram Runnels, accused of being the chief "wire-worker" of the convention that chose Walker.[12]

But Plummer, now as always poor, realized that he could not secure his election as senator without the support of a political organization and he now turned to the opposition. The Whig leaders, preferring Poindexter yet aware of Plummer's proved vote-getting ability, encouraged the representative's campaign, hoping that his entry into the canvass would undermine Walker's strength in the piney woods and Pearl River regions. Plummer's relationship with the Whigs was a peculiar one. He supported Charles Lynch, their gubernatorial choice, and James C. Wilkins and David Dickson, their congressional candidates, in return for financial backing of his senatorial campaign. Accordingly a loan of $5,000 was arranged for him from the sinking fund of the Planters' Bank at Natchez, one of his endorsers being Lynch. Thus Plummer, who had usually voted with the Jackson administration, occupied "rather a singular position on the political chess board."[13]

Although the Whigs made no formal nomination for senator, Plummer hoped that his campaign would establish him as their favorite. But most of the party leaders intended merely to use him to draw the fire of the administration forces. "Our ex member *Plummer,*" Samuel Gwin wrote Van Buren, "now sails under his true collours [*sic*]—an open opposition man & by dent of hard lying he hopes to beat Walker." Gwin expressed confidence that Plummer would be defeated. But he wrote, "I fear if P is killed off too soon, some one else less vulnerable will be started, therefore we will kill him by littles."[14]

Plummer was active early in the summer. In July it was reported that "he has visited every hill and glen, in the northern and eastern counties" in the interest of his candidacy. Once again he attempted to rally the voters to the standard of "Plummer for the People, and the People for Plummer." A campaign newspaper, the *People's Advocate,* was published in Jackson. A "People's Ticket" was distributed through-

[12] Plummer to John N. Drake and others, May 28, 1835, in Vicksburg *Register,* June 18, 1835; Vicksburg *Register,* September 10, 1835.

[13] Miscellaneous Archives, Series M, Nos. 5 and 6, Mississippi Department of Archives and History; Claiborne, *Mississippi, 427*; Jackson *Mississippian,* July 3, 1835.

[14] Gwin to Van Buren, August 15, 1835, Van Buren Papers.

out the state. The "People's Candidate" went from county to county urging the election of legislators pledged to his support.[15]

Yet it was a different kind of campaign from those Plummer had previously conducted. No longer could he attack the Natchez "swell heads" and "aristocrats," for he was dependent upon them for financial assistance. On the question of the removal of the deposits he had disagreed with most of his new associates; indeed in 1834 he had denounced Wilkins, now a congressional candidate on the "People's Ticket," as an "admitted Federalist" because of his opposition to that policy. But the Whigs were now quite content to regard the Bank as a dead issue. "As well might opinions be sought on the alien and sedition or embargo act," Charles C. Mayson, their candidate for state treasurer, declared during the campaign.[16]

Because of the heterogeneous nature of the Whig party, Plummer emphasized throughout the canvass two issues on which the anti-Jackson forces of Mississippi could unite: hostility to Van Buren's presidential aspirations and opposition to the convention mode of nominating candidates, stigmatized as an insidious revival of the discredited caucus system. The Vice President had long been a popular whipping-boy for anti-administration orators in the state and Plummer joined in the attack upon "that political juggler and Magician of Kinderhook." "We are not yet fighting against the great lion," said the editor of the Jackson *State Rights Banner,* "but we are against his whelps; and if the whelps succeed, how can we expect to war successfully against the Lion himself?"[17]

In view of the manner of Walker's nomination, Plummer's bristling antagonism against the convention system was quite understandable. "We believe," said one editor favorable to the "People's Candidate," "that the people of Mississippi are opposed to the caucus system, whether under the old name of 'King Caucus,' or under the milder modern appellation of 'Convention.'" Plummer, who referred to the Walker forces as the "Caucus Party," denounced the convention that nominated his adversary as "a self-constituted self-organized assemblage of men got up, under false pretences, by a few desperate, aspiring political demagogues."[18]

Plummer's entry into the canvass seriously weakened Walker's candidacy because the former appealed to many persons who otherwise would have supported the Natchez attorney in preference to Poindexter.

[15] Jackson *Mississippian,* July 17, October 2, 1835; Vicksburg *Register,* September 17, 1835.

[16] *Register of Debates,* 23 Cong., 1 Sess., 3311; Columbus *Southern Argus,* August 29, 1835.

[17] Columbus *Southern Argus,* September 28, October 5, 1835.

[18] Washington *United States Telegraph,* July 23, 1835, quoting Natchez *Courier;* Washington *Paul Pry,* October 24, 1835.

The movement in favor of Senator Hugh Lawson White of Tennessee as presidential candidate in opposition to Van Buren also hurt the Democratic cause in the state. In March, Henry S. Foote, who had accompanied Walker in his tour of the previous autumn, announced for White. Another well-directed blow was dealt when Senator John Black released for publication the letter that he had received from Walker protesting the removal of the deposits. "In some countries," Black wrote, "it is thought to be the chararcteristic of democracy, that a man have no coat at all. With some of us, the chararcterising trait appears to be, that he change his coat every day."[19]

As summer progressed some Democrats despaired of Walker's chances. "We had no idea," William M. Gwin wrote years later, "that Plummer would have the impudence to put himself in the field." General Thomas Hinds, known to be sympathetic to the White movement, was often mentioned as a compromise candidate, but the Gwins, resolved to secure Walker's election, urged Mississippi's Old Hero not to permit his name to be used for such a purpose. Hinds, who felt a stanch personal loyalty to the President, agreed, but he never forgave Jackson's lieutenants for thwarting his senatorial ambitions.[20]

Walker's campaign continued to lag. Plummer's charge that he was more loyal to the administration than his rival was undeniably efficacious. Furthermore he declared that Old Hickory himself placed no reliance in the Democratic nominee. "Where was . . . Walker," he asked on one occasion, "when I was defending the Hero of New Orleans from the attacks of his enemies in his struggle with the Bank?"[21]

Doctor William M. Gwin, the United States marshal, prescribed the shot-in-the-arm so desperately needed by Walker's followers. In July he wrote Jackson, urging him to deny Plummer's oft-repeated assertion that he reposed no confidence in Walker. In compliance with this request, the Old Hero wrote a letter to Anthony Campbell of Natchez refuting Plummer's allegations. "I have never spoken of Mr. Walker's character," he wrote, "without expressing the high opinion I entertained of his talents and worth . . . . And there is not an individual in Washington or elsewhere, with whom I have conversed on the subject of the prominent men of Mississippi . . . who can not bear witness that I have uniformly regarded Mr. Walker as amongst the first in point of talents, attainments, and political integrity."[22]

[19] Vicksburg *Register,* April 9, 1835; Columbus *Southern Argus,* February 7, 1835.

[20] William M. Gwin to J. F. H. Claiborne, May 6, 1879, Claiborne Papers, Chapel Hill; Samuel Gwin to Jackson, June 27, 1835, Jackson Papers; Claiborne, *Mississippi,* 416; Washington *United States Telegraph,* September 21, 1835, quoting Cincinnati *Daily Gazette.*

[21] Columbus *Southern Argus,* October 5, 1835.

[22] Jackson to Campbell, July 29, 1835 (copy), Jackson to Andrew Jackson Donelson, July 30, 1835, Donelson Papers; William M. Gwin to J. F. H. Claiborne,

Jackson's letter was first published on September 1 in the *Mississippi Free Trader and Natchez Gazette,* a new Democratic journal established during the campaign. The *Free Trader* reprinted it in every issue until the November election and other Democratic presses also published it several times. "I will address the people on Monday next, at Raymond," Walker wrote John H. Mallory on August 31. "It is all important that every friend of mine in the county should be there." The candidate intended to read the President's letter at the rally.[23]

Walker's speech at Raymond, while not as memorable as the one he had delivered in the same town almost exactly one year earlier, marked the turning point of the campaign. The "crowning glory" of the speech was the orator's recitation of Jackson's letter to Anthony Campbell. When he had completed, "there seemed to be but one voice in the meeting and that was for the veteran of Orleans, and against Mr. Plummer, his calumniator." In his subsequent speeches during the campaign Walker invariably produced and read the "original letter" of General Jackson and there was usually some one in the audience familiar with the Old Hero's handwriting to attest to its authenticity.[24]

The "original letter" was a staggering blow to Plummer's senatorial hopes. The Democrats apparently regarded it as "a mandate to the faithful in Mississippi to support Mr. Walker." "The case is before you," one editor admonished the electorate. "JACKSON or *Plummer,* choose ye between them." It was an uneven contest, for in Mississippi "the word of General Jackson [was] considered as binding as the Koran —his will a rule of action—his name too sacred to be uttered without a blessing." Although Jacob J. H. Morris of Perry County wrote John A. Quitman that "the people do not like to give up Plummer," there was equal truth in the observation of the editor of the Grand Gulf *Advertiser:* "They cannot stand his opposition to the old hero."[25]

Even before the appearance of the "original letter," the Democratic leaders had begun their campaign to kill Plummer "by littles"—as Samuel Gwin had promised Van Buren. "Poindexter basely betrayed you—Black proved his servile imitator—Cage deserted," a correspondent of the *Mississippian* wrote, "and Plummer, oh! the all sufficient and redoubtable Mr. Plummer! he did worse than all, for his conduct was

May 6, 1879, Claiborne Papers, Chapel Hill; Claiborne, *Mississippi,* 416; *Niles' Register,* XLIX (October 10, 1835), 92.

[23] Jackson *Mississippian,* October 2, 1835.

[24] *Ibid.,* September 11, 1835; Liberty *Advocate,* September 5, 1839, quoting Vicksburg *Whig;* "Autobiography of Wiley P. Harris," in Rowland, *Courts, Judges, and Lawyers of Mississippi,* 278.

[25] Vicksburg *Register,* September 24, 1835, quoting Jackson *State Rights Banner;* Columbus *Democratic Press,* September 25, 1835, quoting Jackson *Mississippian;* Prentiss (ed.), *Memoir of S. S. Prentiss,* I, 114; Morris to Quitman, October 30, 1835, Claiborne Papers, Jackson; Columbus *Democratic Press,* September 25, 1835, quoting Grand Gulf *Advertiser.*

so equivocal that his friends knew not whether to consider him as an enemy, and his enemies were ashamed to claim him as a friend." "Shall we who have silenced the terrific roar of the Lion of Africa [Poindexter]," asked another Democrat, "now meanly succumb to the dominion of the Jackall?"[26]

Perhaps the most spirited and effective attack on Plummer was delivered by Henry S. Foote, although like the "People's Candidate" a professed supporter of Hugh Lawson White. Samuel Gwin, aware of Foote's scorn for the former representative, spent "several days in Clinton on my way up [to Chocchuma] *to get* Gen. Foote—the leader of the White party in the state & P[lummer] locked horns & I succeeded."[27]

The meeting occurred on August 17 at Clinton. At the conclusion of Plummer's scheduled speech, in which he unloosed his most scorching blasts at Governor Runnels, Foote, a candidate for the state Senate from Hinds County, arose to castigate Plummer as unqualified and untrustworthy: "He is as changeful as the ocean's tide; as fickle as the inconstant gale which ruffles the leaves of spring; chamelion-like, he catches the complexion of every substance with which he comes in contact." "Never in my life," Samuel Gwin jubilantly wrote the President, "did I hear a man get such a lashing as Foote gave him *to his face.*"[28]

As Plummer's fortunes were declining, George Poindexter returned to the scene. In June, Samuel Gwin had written Jackson that his old adversary had "left the State never to return to it" and predicted that "his future days will be passed about the gambling shops at the different watering places in Virginia." During most of the campaign Poindexter's name was scarcely mentioned: Plummer bore the brunt of the Democratic attack. But on September 18 "Old Poins" arrived in Vicksburg and accepted an invitation to a public dinner at nearby Parham's Spring on the 26th. The former senator's return convinced Democrats that Plummer "is only used to draw off a few votes from Robert J. Walker, but the final rally will be upon Poindexter." *"The Whigs are playing a deep game,"* said the editor of the Jackson *Mississippian.*[29]

In the November election liveliest interest centered on the contests for members of the state House and Senate, because the composition of the new legislature would determine the selection of Poindexter's successor. Some candidates agreed to accept instructions from the voters regarding the senatorial race; others announced their stand and asked for

[26] Jackson *Mississippian,* August 21, October 23, 1835.
[27] Gwin to Jackson, September 23, 1835, Jackson Papers.
[28] *Ibid.;* Natchez *Free Trader,* September 22, 1835.
[29] Gwin to Jackson, June 27, 1835, Jackson Papers; Vicksburg *Register,* September 24, 1835; Jackson *Mississippian,* October 23, November 20, 1835.

the endorsement of the electorate. The gubernatorial and congressional races also attracted keen attention. Governor Runnels, the Democratic incumbent, was challenged by Charles Lynch, who espoused the cause of White. Runnels' most strenuous exertions during the campaign, however, were directed against Plummer, who in turn assailed the governor at every turn. For Mississippi's two congressional seats Democrats J. F. H. Claiborne and Benjamin W. Edwards (Daniel W. Wright declined the nomination) were pitted against James C. Wilkins and David Dickson.

The election did not result in a clear-cut victory for either party. In a race whose outcome hovered in doubt for several days, Lynch defeated Runnels for the governorship by a slim majority. The two House seats were divided between the Whigs and the Democrats: Dickson led the field with Claiborne a close second. Both parties claimed effective control of the legislature. Francis P. Blair of the *Globe* predicted that Walker would win by a two-to-one margin; a few days before the balloting the Natchez *Free Trader* asserted that the Democratic candidate would win by a majority of eight votes.[30]

The Whigs were equally sanguine. "We have . . . gained a great triumph already in the election of a Whig Governor and a Whig majority in both branches of the Legislature," wrote Seargent S. Prentiss, representative-elect from Warren County. "We hope to finish our victory by the reelection of Poindexter." Senator John Black, en route to Washington, stated in Louisville that "the election of Mr. Walker, or of any other Van Buren man, to the Senate of the United States is entirely out of the question." The Clinton *Gazette* claimed that two-thirds of the legislators favored White over Van Buren; likewise the Vicksburg *Register* maintained that a majority of them were "decidedly adverse to the politics of the dominant party."[31]

Nevertheless the opposition to Walker was sharply divided among the followers of Plummer and Poindexter; and as the session of the legislature approached, it became increasingly apparent that only an unlikely union of the two forces could prevent the election of the Democratic candidate. From Washington Senator Black wrote John A. Quitman, then serving as acting governor, and offered to resign his seat to create vacancies for both Plummer and Poindexter. "If it be necessary to make this sacrifice to get a favourable result," he wrote, "it will be better to do it than run great hazzard [*sic*] Plummer and Poin would be better than have Walker elected."[32]

[30] Washington *Globe,* December 7, 1835; Natchez *Free Trader,* January 1, 1836.
[31] Prentiss (ed.), *Memoir of S. S. Prentiss,* I, 164; Washington *United States Telegraph,* December 5, 1835; Washington *National Intelligencer,* December 7, 17, 1835.
[32] Black to Quitman, December 15, 1835, Claiborne Papers, Jackson.

Yet no such bargain was reached. Poindexter's strength lay in the tier of counties bordering on the Mississippi; it was extremely doubtful that their legislators would vote for Plummer, who had so often denounced them as "river aristocrats." Plummer was strongest in east Mississippi and in the Pearl River counties of Copiah, Lawrence, Rankin, and Simpson, where many voters had favored legislators pledged to him upon the assumption that he was a more faithful Democrat than the party nominee. Their second choice was Walker, not Poindexter, whom they regarded as the calumniator of the Old Hero.

The legislature assembled in Jackson on January 4, 1836. The House and Senate, after witnessing the inauguration of Governor Lynch, agreed to ballot for a United States senator on Saturday, January 9. On the appointed date the members of the Senate descended the stairs of the two-story brick building on Capitol Street to meet in joint session with the representatives—an occasion that has been termed perhaps "the most far reaching and historic event" ever to take place in that early Mississippi capitol. "I have never witnessed so much excitement in the Legislature," wrote one observer.[33]

On the first ballot Walker was clearly in the lead, although his thirty-six votes were seven shy of a majority. Poindexter polled twenty-three votes while eighteen legislators favored Plummer. The followers of Poindexter, however, realized that his maximum strength had been displayed on the first ballot; on the third many of them voted for James C. Wilkins, while some deflected to Plummer. On each successive vote Walker picked up additional strength, usually from legislators who had earlier supported Plummer. On the fifth ballot he received forty-four out of a possible eighty-four votes and was declared duly elected.[34]

Poindexter had departed after the first ballot. "Our friends to the North," wrote one Democrat, "will now learn from the best authority (the representatives of the people) the true standing of this man in Mississippi." Francis P. Blair was jubilant over the unmitigated humiliation of Jackson's old adversary. He rejoiced "at the satisfaction of seeing this individual reduced to his proper level." William C. Rives congratulated Vice President Van Buren on the Democratic senatorial victory. "We may now hope, I trust, to see better times in that august body," he wrote, "& that you will have no more *carryings down* from any senator disposed to play the part of Cato, the *censor,* in small matters of you & I."[35]

[33] Dunbar Rowland, *The Official and Statistical Register of the State of Mississippi, 1912* (Nashville, 1912), 239-40; Washington *Globe,* February 1, 1836.

[34] *Mississippi Senate Journal* (1836), 71-76.

[35] Washington *Globe,* January 30, February 1, 1836; Rives to Van Buren, January 29, 1836, Van Buren Papers.

The Whigs were disconsolate. "We . . . 'met the enemy,'" wrote Senator John Henderson of Wilkinson County, "and came off shamefully defeated." Henderson, Quitman, and Prentiss had fought a hopeless battle for Poindexter. Representative Albert Gallatin Brown of Copiah had cast five votes for Plummer. "After an exciting week," Quitman wrote his wife, "we have at length elected a Senator in Congress & I regret to say for the honor and independence of the state, the legislature by a majority of one, has chosen Walker. We are thus chained to the car of Van Buren for six years."[36]

The senatorial election had a tragic aftermath. Feelings ran high during the early days of the legislative session. At a party honoring Governor Lynch on the eve of the crucial balloting, Poindexter ascended a table and launched an impassioned tirade against Andrew Jackson. Samuel Gwin hissed the speaker, whereupon Isaac Caldwell, Poindexter's former law partner, challenged Gwin to a duel. The barbarous affair (at thirty paces distance, each contestant was armed with four pistols and given the privilege of advancing) was witnessed by four hundred persons at Clinton on January 12. Caldwell was killed instantly. Gwin, severely wounded, never fully recovered and died two and one-half years later.[37]

The election of Walker bore eloquent witness to Jackson's continuing popularity in Mississippi. The "original letter," as one contemporary observed, "carried with it the authority of a verdict." Doctor Samuel Hogg of Natchez, an old friend of the President, was nevertheless alarmed by its implications. "There are now many political aspirants who would gladly use your great name for the purpose of promoting their individual advancement," he wrote Jackson. Urging the President to "stand aloof from any future political controversies" within the state, he argued that the letter to Campbell, "although written with the purest intention, had well nigh done much mischief here, & could they have started a popular opposing candidate, I fear he would have succeeded."[38]

Walker's greatest strength lay in the new counties created from the lands ceded by the Choctaw Indians. Of the sixteen representatives from these counties, fourteen ultimately voted for him. In this territory, obtained by the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek, the settlers, many of them former Tennesseans, felt a heartfelt gratitude to Old Hickory and were unfamiliar with Plummer, long the idol of the Pearl River

[36] Henderson to William A. A. Chisholm, January 9, 1836, Woodville *Republican,* January 23, 1836; James Byrne Ranck, *Albert Gallatin Brown, Radical Southern Nationalist* (New York, 1937), 8; Quitman to Eliza Turner Quitman, January 10, 1835 [1836], Quitman Papers.

[37] Jackson *Mississippian,* January 19, 1836; "Gwin-Caldwell Duel," ms. in Claiborne Papers, Chapel Hill; Foote, *Casket of Reminiscences,* 442.

[38] Claiborne, *Mississippi,* 410; Hogg to Jackson, January 25, 1836, Jackson Papers.

and piney woods regions. Walker's deeds at the Chocchuma land sales also apparently won the endorsement of the new voters of Mississippi.

For Poindexter, at fifty-seven, defeat meant involuntary political retirement. *"The State of Mississippi*—The home of my youth, with all thy faults, I love thee still my country," he proposed as a toast for a public dinner held in Jackson the week following the senatorial election. In February, John Catron wrote Andrew Jackson Donelson from New Orleans that "Poindexter is here, & down effectually. His party shrink from his fellowship now he is out of power." In November, the former senator accidentally stepped out of a second-story window at the Mansion House in Natchez and suffered crippling injuries that maimed him for life.[39]

"I fought the battle to the best of my humble ability," Poindexter told a Natchez audience in 1838, "and fell under the frowns of a majority of my constituents whose best interests I had defended at the sacrifice of the highest political preferment which awaited me, had I clung to the skirts of him who was 'born to command.' " He ascribed his downfall to the "overwhelming influence of the popular idol of the day." He subsequently moved to Lexington, Kentucky, but afterwards returned to Jackson to resume the practice of law. There, in the city named for his ancient political foe, he spent his last days and died on September 5, 1853.[40]

Poindexter, in the more mature opinion of J. F. H. Claiborne (who had once considered him a "great criminal at the bar of his country"), was "the ablest man ever employed in the service of our state—often misunderstood—greatly slandered, and never fully appreciated until too late." It was perhaps inevitable that Poindexter and Jackson, both strong-willed, opinionated men, should have clashed. Although the senator had announced his support of Jackson prior to his election, he did not intend to become a "mere machine to be worked by the impetus of Executive power." He held "too lofty a sense" of his own dignity.[41]

In an age of increasing democracy, Poindexter lacked confidence in the political competence of the electorate. His constituents failed to support him in his opposition to the President; therefore he had less reason than Jackson to respect their abililty to make wise decisions. Instead he consoled himself with the belief that his course was approved by "the *intelligent* portion of the people of the State"—a decided minor-

[39] Woodville *Republican,* January 23, 1836; Catron to Donelson, February 11, 1836, Donelson Papers; Natchez *Free Trader,* November 17, 1836.

[40] Natchez *Courier and Journal,* April 27, 1838; Charles Sackett Sydnor, "George Poindexter," in Allen Johnson and Dumas Malone (eds.), *Dictionary of American Biography,* 20 vols. and index (New York, 1928-1936), XV, 30.

[41] Washington *Globe,* November 7, 1834, quoting Natchez *American Standard;* Port Gibson *Reveille,* April 21, 1877; Poindexter to Claiborne, March 26, 1832, Claiborne Papers, Jackson.

ity, apparently, of the voters of Mississippi. The remainder he once called "the most gullible" people in the world. And when Franklin County gave Van Buren a preponderant majority in the presidential election of 1836, Poindexter declared that if he were going to select one hundred fools in the United States, "he would make the Draw for them on Franklin County."[42]

Although as senator he often lectured his constituents, he never listened to them; on the contrary, he believed that such a practice would be repugnant to his duty as a legislator. When administration supporters in Mississippi denounced his opposition to Van Buren's nomination as minister to England, he declared that his "opinion of persons nominated to office . . . cannot be a matter of serious concern to any, save only those whose individual interests are involved in the action of the senate upon their nominations." In other words, his vote on Van Buren's nomination was none of his constituents' business.[43]

Poindexter was also alarmed by the radical economic program launched by the administration in its war against the Bank of the United States. "But we are told there is no danger!" he said to a Philadelphia gathering in 1835. " 'General Jackson is a DEMOCRAT! We are all DEMOCRATS! We belong to the great DEMOCRATIC party! We are the friends of the poor dear people; we will fill their pockets with hard money, and down with the MONSTER!' " Noting that the devil himself was able to quote scripture, he declared that "with equal plausibility all usurpers, while they hug power, and trample on popular rights at every step, sing hosannas to the people, and cry DEMOCRACY FOR EVER!"[44]

With the failure of his campaign for the Senate, Plummer, although only in his early thirties, vanished swiftly from the public notice—to recapture it only at rare intervals. From a political standpoint it little mattered that a newspaper report of his death in 1837 proved to be a hoax. The last years of his life went spent in obscurity. He died at Jackson on September 21, 1852, and, according to newspaper accounts, "in great destitution."[45]

For five years Plummer had been a powerful force in Mississippi politics. "He was the most adroit tactician in the state," J. F. H. Claiborne wrote in 1857, "—as a stump orator unequalled—and those who only knew him in his decadence, a defunct politician and a ruined man, can have no conception of the influence he exerted." A number of

[42] *Biographical Sketch of George Poindexter,* 18; William R. Hogan and Edwin A. Davis (eds.), *William Johnson's Natchez: The Ante-Bellum Diary of a Free Negro* (Baton Rouge, 1951), 146.

[43] Poindexter to editor of Raymond *Patriot,* March 31, 1832, in Natchez *Gazette,* May 11, 1832.

[44] Washington *United States Telegraph,* April 13, 1835.

[45] Natchez *Free Trader,* March 14, 1837; Natchez *Daily Courier,* September 28, 1852.

circumstances explain Plummer's meteoric rise and fall. In 1830 he was elected to Congress despite the opposition of the recognized Jacksonian leaders of the state. Consequently in Washington he often followed an independent course. Such a line of action was possible as long as the Democratic party in Mississippi, without any formidable opposition, remained large and unwieldy. But five years later there were two parties vying for political control of the state. Plummer, unwilling to adjust himself to the new political climate, became a man without a party at a time when party endorsement was a *sine qua non* for political advancement. "It is a difficult task," he conceded in 1834, for a politician to succeed "without leaning on one of the prominent parties for support."[46]

Plummer's remarkable strength lay in his ability to unite the voters of the Pearl River and piney woods regions against the river counties. In 1830 by such tactics it was possible to carry the state in a political contest. But during the next few years over thirty new counties were created in central and northern Mississippi from lands ceded by the Choctaw and Chickasaw Indians, and east Mississippi lost its powerful position in state politics. In addition, the plantation system, once largely concentrated in the southwest, was spreading into other regions, altering the sectional alignment of the state. Furthermore Plummer lost his complete dominance of east Mississippi as a result of his opposition to Jackson in 1835.

At times Plummer attempted to unite the poor against the rich—to create a division in the state along class lines. Such an appeal had contributed to his victory over Wilkins in 1830. But in the middle eighteen-thirties Mississippi was riding the crest of the so-called "Flush Times." Fortunes, at least on paper, were being made almost overnight, and even Mississippians of modest means looked to the day when they too would acquire wealth. "If the gentleman [Plummer] intends the line to be drawn between the rich and the poor," Representative Harry Cage had said in 1834, "then the distinction is an invidious one, and should not be permitted to insinuate itself into any portion of the society of this free and independent Government, where the road to wealth and fame is equally open to all."[47]

Plummer himself was not free from the temptations of the "Flush Times." For his senatorial campaign in 1835 he used part of his borrowed capital to procure a stylish barouche and a uniformed servant—strange deportment for the self-styled "workingman's friend." Like many another Mississippian of his day he speculated extensively in public lands; he and Governor Runnels headed rival companies for the de-

[46] Raymond *Hinds County Gazette,* August 5, 1857; *Register of Debates,* 23 Cong., 1 Sess., 4821.

[47] *Register of Debates,* 23 Cong., 1 Sess., 3321.

velopment of Yalobusha County prior to the panic of 1837. Afterwards Plummer, who had once charged that the sole object of bank directors was "to get the money of the neighborhood under their control, and thereby provide some of themselves with a living without labor, as presidents, cashiers, and clerks," became president of the Bank of Grenada! That institution, like the other wildcat banks of that era, soon failed.[48]

For Walker, at thirty-four, election to the United States Senate provided the opportunity for the beginning of a notable political career. The forces of Jacksonian democracy, which were largely responsible for Poindexter's downfall, and those of the "Flush Times," which had contributed so much to Plummer's defeat, had been a boon to him. The popularity of the President and the prosperity of the state had been his most valuable assets.

The campaign of 1835 had been heralded as foreshadowing the presidential race of 1836 in Mississippi. But the results had been too close to predict a victory for either Van Buren or White. A Whig governor and a Democratic senator had been elected, while each party had sent a representative to Congress. Although Van Buren himself was not held in high esteem in Mississippi, Jackson's popularity seemed certain to win considerable support for him. The presidential election of 1836 in the state then would largely depend on whether the economy continued to prosper during the waning months of the Jackson administration.

[48] Claiborne, *Mississippi,* 427; Rowland (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Mississippi History,* I, 804-05; *Register of Debates,* 23 Cong., 1 Sess., 1514; Canton *Herald,* December 5, 1838.

CHAPTER IX

FLUSH TIMES

> "By the wise and humane policy of General Jackson, the Indians have been removed; we have obtained twenty millions of acres, and the swelling tide of an interprizing population is rolling in upon us. . . . The Yazoo, the Tombecbee, and the Pearl, with their noble family of waters, now sweep past fleecy fields and flourishing villages, gladdened by the hum of commerce, and rejoicing in the beatitudes of an extended civilization."
>
> J. F. H. Claiborne[1]

In 1835 politics was an absorbing topic in Mississippi and her campaign of that year attracted national attention. "What has become of the mails between this city and the State of Mississippi?" asked a Cincinnati editor in late November. "We have received scarcely any papers from that State for nearly a month. This is, at this time, exceedingly provoking, as we wish to know something of the result of the election held there long since."[2] The leading newspapers in the nation's capital printed column after column of material relating to the crucial senatorial canvass between Poindexter, Plummer, and Walker.

Yet one would err to presume that politics was the Mississippian's primary concern in 1835. The opening up of the Choctaw and Chickasaw lands to white settlement presented him with new and more pressing problems. There were forests to be cleared; homes to be built; crops to be planted, harvested and marketed; slaves to be bought; towns to be erected; banks to be chartered; and railroads to be constructed. "We are all too earnestly bent on the hurried occupations of a new country, to make a business of politics," said a resident of Yalobusha County in July.[3]

In 1835 Mississippi was near the zenith of the turbulent era that Joseph Glover Baldwin later called the "Flush Times." "Land, negroes and every description of property has [*sic*] become very valuable here," John A. Quitman wrote his brother in April. Encouraged by such reports, thousands flocked to the Southwest in the confident hope of reaping a fortune in the new promised land. "The country is full of land hunters," Samuel Gwin wrote the President from Chocchuma, "& in a few years here & north of this will be as populous as most of the old

[1] Natchez *Free Trader,* August 11, 1835.
[2] Washington *United States Telegraph,* December 9, 1835.
[3] *Ibid.,* August 8, 1835.

states." In July Stephen Cocke of Columbus wrote Nicholas Biddle (whom he did not know) suggesting that they form a partnership (with Biddle advancing the money) for the purpose of speculating in Chickasaw lands. Cocke confidently envisioned profits of from 100 to 500 per cent within a brief period of time. Although this contemplated partnership did not materialize, it has been estimated that at one time or another 80 per cent of the land in the Chickasaw cession was held by individuals, partnerships, or companies anticipating speculative gains.[4]

Public land sales were brisk. In 1832 only 261,313.67 acres had been sold at Mississippi's three federal land offices located at Washington, Augusta, and Mount Salus (Clinton). But in 1833, with the opening of the Choctaw lands to public auction at new offices in Columbus and Chocchuma, 1,121,454.97 acres were sold, more than double the record of any other state. Mississippi again led the nation in the amount of money from land sales paid into the Treasury in 1834 and 1835. In the latter year alone the state accounted for the sale of 2,931,181.15 acres, far greater than the quantity sold in the entire nation three years earlier! In 1833 Mount Salus was the busiest land office in the country and in 1834 and 1835 Columbus had that honor.[5]

In the northern and central parts of the state new towns were springing up almost overnight: Amsterdam, Carrollton, Coffeeville, Grenada, Holly Springs, Kosciusko, Louisville, Macon, Oxford, Paulding, Pontotoc, Ripley, Tuscahoma, to mention only a few. On New Year's Day, 1834, the Indians had occupied the land where Paulding was soon to be located; by the Fourth of July, 1835, the town already boasted five stores, a gin, a grist mill, a tanyard, and shops occupied respectively by a chairmaker, a blacksmith, and a shoemaker. Three hundred persons attended the town's Independence Day celebration that year. Bishop Leonidas Polk, who visited Holly Springs a few years later, wrote that "this is one of those towns in the vast West, which seems to have sprung into existence as if by magic. Three years previous to the time of my visit; it was an open cotton plantation; it now numbers its inhabitants by thousands, and spreads its habitations over several miles square."[6]

[4] Joseph Glover Baldwin, *The Flush Times of Alabama and Mississippi. A Series of Sketches* (New York, 1854); John A. Quitman to Henry S. Quitman, April 30, 1835, Quitman Papers; Gwin to Jackson, September 23, 1835, Jackson Papers; Cocke to Biddle, July 19, 1835, Biddle Papers; James W. Silver, "Land Speculation Profits in the Chickasaw Cession," *Journal of Southern History*, X (February, 1944), 86.

[5] *Senate Documents*, 23 Cong., 1 Sess., No. 9, 17-20; *ibid.*, 23 Cong., 2 Sess., No. 2, 88-90; *ibid.*, 24 Cong., 2 Sess., No. 3, 8-11; *ibid.*, 25 Cong., 2 Sess., No. 11, 12-16; *ibid.*, 25 Cong., 3 Sess., No. 17, 7-11; *House Executive Documents*, 24 Cong., 1 Sess., No. 5, 10-13.

[6] Columbus *Southern Argus*, August 29, 1835; *Journal of the Proceedings of the Bishops, Clergy, and Laity of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America in a General Convention Held in the City of New York, from October 6th to October 19th, Inclusive A. D. 1841* (New York, 1841), 158.

Many of the villages were not as pretentious as Paulding or Holly Springs. A. E. Addison, who journeyed to Carrollton in the spring of 1835, was sorely disappointed: "This place is miscalled a town, it being nothing more than a few log cabins scattered about in the woods." "A heap of little towns are growing up along the Black," said Mr. Horsey, a character in William Gilmore Simms' Mississippi novel, *Border Beagles*. "I could name a dozen but it's no more use naming little towns than little chickens, there's so many of them, and they all look so much alike." According to James R. Creecy, "some of the embryo cities were removed by a single wagon to other 'locations,' which had their day, and were known no more forever."[7]

Contemporaries have left us vivid accounts of the speculative fever that swept Mississippi during the era of the "Flush Times." "A new El Dorado had been discovered," recalled William H. Sparks. "Fortunes were made in a day, without enterprise or work; and unexampled prosperity seemed to cover the land as with a golden canopy—forests were swept away in a week; labor came in crowds to the South to produce cotton; and where yesterday the wilderness darkened over the land with her wild forests, to-day the cotton plantation whitened the earth." "A tract which was entered yesterday at $1.25 per acre," Thomas Harney wrote in 1842, "was sold today at five. The next day it was sold at ten. Soon these same uplands found their summit at 40 dollars. Negroes were eagerly sought at $3,200 a pair." "Vicksburg is a busy place," James D. Davidson wrote in 1836. "The people here are run mad with speculation. They do business in . . . a kind of phrenzy. Money is scarce, but credit is plenty, and he who has no money can do as much business as he who has." And Davidson had been told that Vicksburg "is the State in Miniature."[8]

Money is scarce, but credit is plenty. In this statement lay the key to Mississippi's "Flush Times." Although the land craze placed a considerable premium upon capital within the state, the Planters' Bank and the Agricultural Bank (which became a depository for federal funds in 1836) were liberal, or rather munificent, in the extension of accommodations. The receipts from the public land sales were assigned to the custody of the "pet" banks, which in turn lent the money to speculators who reinvested in public lands. In addition, the Planters' Bank lent the greater portion of its sinking fund, which had been set aside to pay the interest on its state-endorsed bonds when they fell due! "Credit

[7] A. E. Addison to Joseph Holt, April 21, 1835, Joseph Holt Papers, Library of Congress; William Gilmore Simms, *Border Beagles, a Tale of Mississippi* (New York, 1882), 30; James R. Creecy, *Scenes in the South, and Other Miscellaneous Pieces* (Washington, 1860), 106-07.

[8] Sparks, *Memories of Fifty Years*, 363; *Mississippi House Journal* (1842), 853; Herbert A. Keller (ed.), "A Journey through the South in 1836: Diary of James D. Davidson," *Journal of Southern History*, I (August, 1935), 356.

was a thing of course," wrote Joseph Glover Baldwin. "To refuse it—if the thing was ever done—were an insult for which a bowie-knife were not too summary or exemplary a means of redress." "Men not worth a button," wrote J. F. H. Claiborne, "would coolly ask for an indorsement for ten thousand dollars, and indorsements in blank to be filled up to suit any trade that might offer. A refusal to indorse was resented as a reflection on one's integrity; and to suggest a mortgage as security for an indorsement was a matter of great delicacy, and generally offensive." Yet the Planters' and the Agricultural Banks were not able to satisfy the demands of the speculators, who urged the creation of additional banks in the hopes of obtaining more capital for their grandiose schemes.[9]

The railroad excitement, which struck Mississippi in the early eighteen-thirties, contributed to the incessant demands for more banks. To secure for the state the benefits that were predicted from the "almost magic operation of a railroad car," a committee of the House of Representatives proposed in November, 1833, to extend a "judicious grant of banking powers to citizens who are willing to furnish the capital" for such ventures. Acting Governor Charles Lynch, while favoring the establishment of three railroad lines in the state, was opposed to the extension of banking privileges. The legislature, however, rejected his counter-suggestion that the state should subscribe one-third of the stock in the proposed corporations.[10]

Thus the Mississippi legislature of 1833, hoping to earn for itself "approving consciences, the plaudits of the present generation, and the gratitude of ages yet to come," granted banking privileges to the West Feliciana Rail Road Company, the Commercial Rail Road Bank of Vicksburg, and the Grand Gulf Rail Road and Banking Company. Soon afterwards Anthony Campbell of Adams County predicted that "there is not a town or village, however remote and insignificant, that will not demand and must receive, a Railroad Charter, with banking privileges." By 1836 banking had become "so powerful a mania," reported the Jackson *Mississippian,* that no corporation, "from a bridge company down to a hotel," hesitated to seek such advantages when applying for a charter. "We believe," said Volney E. Howard, editor of that journal, "that unless some check is put to the mania for creating banks in this state, that our circulating medium will be ruined."[11]

[9] James Silk Buckingham, *The Slave States of America,* 2 vols. (London, 1842), I, 454; Miscellaneous Archives, Series M, Nos. 5 and 6, Mississippi Department of Archives and History; Baldwin, *Flush Times,* 83; Claiborne, *Life and Times of Gen. Sam Dale, the Mississippi Partisan* (New York, 1860), 225. See also John Hebron Moore, *Agriculture in Ante-Bellum Mississippi* (New York, 1958), 70.

[10] *Mississippi House Journal,* 17 Sess. (November, 1833), 30-31, 116, 117.

[11] *Ibid.,* 120; *Mississippi Session Laws,* 17 Sess. (November, 1833), 125-34, 140-47, 151-55; Campbell to George Poindexter, January 1, 1834, Claiborne Papers, Jackson; Jackson *Mississippian,* June 24, September 2, 1836.

Sectional jealousies tended to spur the railroad and banking movements in Mississippi. William P. Mellen, editor of the Natchez *Courier,* was opposed on grounds of principle to the granting of banking powers to the railroad companies, but when the legislature considered awarding such franchises to rival interests to Natchez, he became alarmed. "What will Natchez be worth," he asked, "after the completion of these roads, when *more than half* its present business will have been diverted to other towns on the Mississippi?" He urged his fellow townsmen to petition for a similar railroad charter. "To the banking privileges we are opposed," he said, "but they must be obtained in self defense. The legislature cannot refuse to us what it has granted to others."[12]

On the other hand, the editor of the Vicksburg *Register* expressed anxiety at the prospect of a railroad connecting Natchez with the Pearl River. "What will be the effect on Vicksburg?" he asked . "If we remain blind to our own interests and as supine as we have been, and the rail road from Natchez is completed, our roads will become bridle paths and our city will become a hamlet."[13]

Both Natchez and Vicksburg became apprehensive when in January, 1835, the New Orleans and Nashville Railroad received a charter from the Louisiana legislature and petitioned the Mississippi legislature for permission to extend its tracks through the state. The Mississippi River towns, fearful that such a railroad would impair their commerce with the communities between the Mississippi and Pearl rivers, were determined to restrict the operations of the proposed line to the area east of the Pearl, while the northern and middle counties generally favored a route west of that river. The proposed route of this railroad was a minor issue in the gubernatorial campaign of 1835 and was a major consideration during the legislative session of 1836. "The all absorbing subject with us now," John A. Quitman wrote at that time, "is the New Orleans & Nashville Rail road. If we can send it over the Pearl we are safe. If not I shall consider the prosperity of Natches [*sic*] gone."[14]

The western counties were able to block the charter in the 1836 legislature, but the following January, with the Chickasaw counties represented, the railroad was given permission to extend its lines into Mississippi. Within a few months, however, the New Orleans and Nashville Railroad lay a victim to the panic of 1837.[15]

[12] Natchez *Courier,* December 20, 1833.

[13] Woodville *Republican,* October 18, 1834.

[14] James E. Winston, "Notes on the Economic History of New Orleans, 1803-1836," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review,* XI (September, 1924), 212-13; Columbus *Southern Argus,* August 22, 1835; Woodville *Republican,* February 6, 13, 1836; Jackson *Mississippian,* June 24, July 8, September 30, 1836; Quitman to Eliza Turner Quitman, January 28, 1836, Quitman Papers.

[15] *Mississippi Session Laws* (January, 1837), 25-33; R. S. Cotterill, "The Beginnings of Railroads in the Southwest," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review,* VIII (1922), 321-24.

The directors of the Mississippi railroads were far more interested in the exercise of their banking privileges than in the construction of railroads, for the former promised larger and more immediate profits. "In these enterprises," wrote Charles Hillman Brough, "there was more watered stock sold than there were cross-ties laid; post note clippers commanded a premium over good road beds; reckless speculation brooked nothing as prosaic as the actual construction of railroads, on the successful operation of which it was supposed fabulous dividends would be declared." The institutions were liberal in granting loans, and most of them issued notes long before their capital had been subscribed. (According to Thomas Harney, the notes of the Commercial Rail Road Bank of Vicksburg were soon "seen as thick as autumnal leaves.") Although numerous railroad corporations were chartered during the decade, only two lines were in partial operation in 1839, by which time the term "railroad bank" was regarded as the "modern refined epithet of *public cheat*."[16]

In the villages and towns of Mississippi a boisterous society prevailed during the "Flush Times." Most of the immigrants were "young men in quest for fortune." "An old man, or a gray hair," Joseph Holt Ingraham wrote in 1834, "scarcely relieves . . . [the traveler's] vision. He will be reminded, as he gazes about him upon the youthful faces, of the fabled village, whose inhabitants had drunk at the fountain of rejuvenescence. Women he will find to resemble angels, more than he had believed; for 'few and far between,' are their forms seen gliding through the streets, blockaded by young gentlemen, and 'few' are the bright eyes that beam upon him from the galleries and windows."[17]

In such a competitive society the immigrant was apt to be proud, quick to take offense, and eager to defend his honor. "There is a kind of bullying gasconad[e] of manner in vogue not at all to my taste," A. E. Addison wrote in 1835. "It is not uncommon to see a man travelling about armed with a pair of pistols and a bowie knife at a time when he has no idea of an attack. In the village the men go armed, as I am informed with dirks & pistols." Fighting, drinking, and gambling were frequent pastimes. But inquired Simms' Mr. Horsey, "would you have gentlemen and Christians in a part of the world where there's no timber cut, no lands cleared, no houses built, nothing done, but what's done by the squatters and that sort of people? No, no; your

[16] Charles Hillman Brough, "The History of Banking in Mississippi," *Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society,* III (1900), 326; L. A. Besançon (comp.), *Besançon's Annual Register of the State of Mississippi, for the Year 1838* (Natchez, 1838), 231-32; *Mississippi House Journal* (1842), 853; Jackson *Mississippian,* May 31, 1839. See also Charles Ripley Johnson, "Railroad Legislation and Building in Mississippi, 1830-1840," *Journal of Mississippi History,* IV (1942), 195-206.

[17] Prentiss (ed.), *A Memoir of S. S. Prentiss,* I, 129; Ingraham, *The Southwest by a Yankee,* II, 168-69.

only chance is a keen eye, a quick hand, and a steady head. Trust to these in the Yazoo; there are few better friends anywhere."[18]

Although it was commonly believed that such a society existed throughout Mississippi, many of the new citizens were enterprising yeomen who had come to the state to establish new homes for themselves and their families. "The Mississippian has been caricatured into a swaggering rowdy," Reuben Davis wrote years later, "always drinking whiskey and flourishing revolvers and bowie-knives." Davis conceded that "many of them drank hard, swore freely, and were utterly reckless of consequences when their passions were aroused," but he contended that "the great body of the settlers were sober, industrious men, who met hardships and toil with patient courage, and whose hands were as ready to extend help as they were to resist violence and oppression."[19]

Actually a majority of the immigrants to Mississippi came involuntarily. For while during the decade the white population increased by 154 per cent, the slave population swelled by 197 per cent. By 1840 Negroes, who had comprised less than 41 per cent of the state's population ten years earlier, outnumbered the whites. In nine counties adjoining the Mississippi and Yazoo rivers over 65 per cent of the population were slaves. The rapid spread of the plantation system during the "Flush Times" strengthened the hold of the institution of slavery upon the Mississippians; the tremendous influx of Negroes into the state was also the cause of grave concern on the part of the whites.

Prior to the eighteen-thirties Mississippians had generally been apologetic in their defense of the South's peculiar institution. In 1826 a legislative committee declared that in spite of the "national evil of slavery" its existence had been rendered inevitable as a result of "circumstances over which we could have no control." Two years later Governor Gerard C. Brandon spoke of slavery as "an evil at best" which oppressed the "poorer class of every community into which it has been introduced."[20]

With the phenomenal growth of the plantation system in the state during the eighteen-thirties, Mississippians ceased to express regret for the existence of slavery and became rabid defenders of that institution. In 1836 a committee of the House of Representatives declared that the people of the state "look upon the institution of slavery, as it exists among them, not as a curse, but as a blessing, as the legitimate condition of the African race, as authorized by the laws of God and the dictates

[18] Addison to Joseph Holt, April 21, 1835, Holt Papers; Simms, *Border Beagles,* 31.

[19] Reuben Davis, *Recollections of Mississippi and Mississippians* (Boston, 1891), 18.

[20] *Mississippi House Journal,* 9 Sess. (1826), 50; *ibid.,* 11 Sess. (1828), 15.

of reason and philanthropy; and that they hope to transmit this institution to their posterity, as the best part of their inheritance."[21]

The abolitionist crusade profoundly influenced the Mississippians' re-examination of the institution of slavery. The Nat Turner insurrection of 1831 in Southampton County, Virginia, was attributed to the incendiary effect of anti-slavery propaganda. Mississippians demanded and obtained the strengthening of the state codes relative to free Negroes and slaves. A correspondent of the Natchez *Gazette* urged that the patrols, heretofore notoriously lax, exercise their functions with unsparing diligence. "Shall it require the repetition, upon our shores, of the scenes of Southampton," he asked, "to awaken our citizens to a sense of their danger?" In 1833, following the passage of legislation that led to the abolition of slavery within the British Empire, former Representative William Haile warned that Congress should not be permitted to legislate at all concerning slavery. "The planters of Jamaica relied too strongly on the justice of Parliament," he said. "Have we forgotten the fate of St. Domingo, . . . her calamities and her horrors?"[22]

In the summer of 1835 many Mississippians were led to believe that the state was indeed threatened with the fate of Santo Domingo. According to widespread rumors a gigantic slave insurrection planned by the confederates of John A. Murrell, the "Great Western Land Pirate," was scheduled to occur on July 4 in Madison County. The terrified residents of Livingston and vicinity supplanted normal judicial proceedings with the law of "Judge Lynch," administered by a committee of "thirteen of the most respectable citizens" of the community. While this extra-legal tribunal questioned, tortured, sentenced, and hanged suspected Negroes and itinerant whites, the panic-stricken families of the county's planters gathered together each night for protection, fearing the worst. Soon the hysteria spread to neighboring Hinds and Warren counties. In Vicksburg resentment turned against the professional gamblers, some of whom allegedly were associates of those implicated in Madison County. On July 6 the "respectable citizens" of that town hanged five gamblers who failed to heed a peremptory warning to leave the community. By mid-July approximately twelve white men and a much larger number of Negroes had fallen victim to the rule of "Lynch's law" in Mississippi.[23]

The events of the summer of 1835 made the Mississippians nervously sensitive to the abolitionist attacks on the institution of slavery. In

[21] *Ibid.* (1836), 197.

[22] *Mississippi Session Laws,* 14 Sess. (November, 1830), 86-88; *ibid.,* 15 Sess. (1831), 10-14; Natchez *Gazette,* October 26, 1831; Woodville *Republican,* October 19, 1833.

[23] See Edwin A. Miles, "The Mississippi Slave Insurrection Scare of 1835," *Journal of Negro History,* XLII (January, 1957), 48-60.

August the postmaster at Clinton received several copies of *Human Rights,* an anti-slavery pamphlet published by R. G. Williams of New York. Widespread indignation was expressed throughout the state. "Let these fanatics recollect the late proceedings in our own state," warned the Jackson *Mississippian.* Forty angry citizens of Hinds County dispatched an open letter to the publisher, suggesting that he cease sending his "dirty falsehoods and pitiful caricatures on inanimate paper." "Why not send us your Tappans, your Coxes, your Garrisons, or any of your chief apostles of iniquity. . . ?" they asked. "Our sister state of Kentucky annually supplies us with the article of *hemp,* and it shall be at the service of your emissaries who are apt to be seized with the *croup* on entering into our State!"[24]

The transactions of July, 1835, materially affected the state political campaigns of that year. The excitement of public feeling that swept the state undoubtedly damaged the senatorial candidacy of Franklin E. Plummer. Plummer had never been a planter nor an ardent defender of the "peculiar institution"; indeed because of his New England birth he was often suspected of entertaining anti-slavery views. In 1834 he had denounced the "lordly aristocratic slaveholders, many of whom have as little regard for the rights of the people as for their own negroes." During the senatorial campaign Henry S. Foote declared that Plummer was "peculiarly unfit to occupy a seat in the national councils from the state of Mississippi at the present moment, just on the eve of that great contest evidently pending between the fanitic [*sic*] abolitionists of the north, and the slave holders of the south." In previous canvasses Plummer had appealed to class prejudices; yet after 1835 the citizens of Mississippi and the South felt a necessity for a firm unity among themselves to withstand northern attacks upon their institutions and social order. With increasing emphasis upon sectional solidarity there was less room for class division among the southern whites.[25]

On the other hand, Robert J. Walker attempted to capitalize upon the events of the summer. Earlier that year he and J. F. H. Claiborne had both transferred their residences to Madison County in an apparent attempt to divest themselves of the political opprobium of living in Natchez. Walker, who had purchased a plantation near Madisonville, quickly identified himself with the slaveowners of the Pearl River region. "I am a cotton planter," he declared in a widely circulated address, "residing in the heart of your state, upon its greatest central

[24] Washington *Paul Pry,* September 26, 1835, quoting Jackson *Mississippian;* Thomas Harney and others to R. G. Williams, August 28, 1835, in Washington *United States Telegraph,* September 24, 1835.

[25] Claiborne, *Mississippi,* 426; *Register of Debates,* 23 Cong., 1 Sess., 4835; Natchez *Free Trader,* September 22, 1835.

artery, the Pearl, in the county of Madison, identified with you in feelings, interests and pursuits."[26]

In the legislature of 1836 senators and representatives vied with each other in defense of slavery and in denunciation of its opponents. Acting Governor John A. Quitman, declaring that "the morality, the expediency, and the duration of the institution of slavery, are questions, which belong exclusively to ourselves," recommended that resolutions be adopted calling on the non-slaveholding states to take concerted action "to devise measures for the full and ample protection of our rights, our domestic happiness and repose."[27]

More restrained, Governor Charles Lynch in his inaugural address declared that the subject of slave disturbances was "one of delicacy, and to be approached with courtesy and circumspection." The legislature adopted a resolution calling for the northern states to "suppress and restrain by penal laws, all citizens and all others coming within their several jurisdictions, from associating, plotting, or conspiring to undermine, disturb, or abolish our institution of domestic slavery in any manner or by any means," but rejected a proposed resolution looking toward a southern convention if the free states did not comply with their request.[28]

The growing importance of the slavery controversy in national politics loomed as a threat to Martin Van Buren's presidential aspirations in 1836. In the South there were lingering suspicions that the "Little Magician" was not "safe" on that crucial question. Aware of this feeling, Samuel Gwin had written the Vice President in 1834, urging him to issue a vigorous denial of the oft-repeated charge that "you are in favor of an interference by Congress in manumitting our slave property." "This subject you know," he wrote, "is one of the most extreme delicacy in the Southern States. Scarcely any subject could be more so. When driven from every other point, they [your enemies] take refuge in this nut shell."[29]

In his reply, first published in the Richmond *Enquirer,* Van Buren expressed surprise that such allegations, which he termed "destitute of foundation," could ever have been made. "My opinions on the subject of Congress over slave property in the Southern States, are so well understood by my friends, that I am surprised that an attempt to impose upon the public respecting them should be hazarded."[30]

After the abortive slave insurrection of 1835, Gwin urged Van Buren and his friends to speak out against the northern anti-slavery fanatics. "The knife has been raised over us & there is a desperate phrenzy pre-

[26] Natchez *Free Trader,* October 29, 1835.
[27] *Mississippi House Journal* (1836), 14-16.
[28] *Ibid.,* 70, 194-97; *Mississippi Session Laws* (1836), 101-03.
[29] Gwin to Van Buren, May 20, 1834, Van Buren Papers.
[30] Van Buren to Gwin, July 11, 1834 (copy), *ibid.*

vailing," Gwin wrote. With Hugh Lawson White, a southerner, in the presidential race, Gwin and the other Van Buren supporters in Mississippi experienced anxiety as Whig orators and editors intensified their attacks against the Vice President. "What . . . has Van Buren to recommend himself to the South?" asked one editor favorable to White. "What has he to recommend him to the freemen of Mississippi? . . . Separate Van Buren, from Andrew Jackson. Take from him the countenance given by Jackson, and the influence which he has exerted in his behalf, and who in the wildest extravagance of his imagination, would ever have thought of Martin Van Buren, as President of the United States?"[31]

Van Buren's vice presidential candidate, although a southerner, added little strength to the Democratic cause in the South. Colonel Richard M. Johnson of Kentucky, "the man who killed Tecumseh," was not popular in Mississippi. The state Democratic convention of December, 1834, had proposed Senator Thomas Hart Benton as Mississippi's choice for the vice presidency, but Benton had asked that his name not be considered for that position. His refusal afforded Henry S. Foote an opportunity to withdraw his support from the Van Buren cause in the spring of 1835. Nevertheless that May the Baltimore convention of the Democratic party endorsed Johnson for the vice presidency.[32]

Johnson's candidacy was distasteful to the South because of his well-known relationship with Julia Chinn, his mulatto slave; the Kentuckian made no pretense of denying his paternity of her two daughters. John P. Gilbert, Whig candidate for state auditor in 1835, denounced Johnson as "a man who has done so much to break down the barriers so necessary to be kept up between the two different classes of population which exist in this country." The Van Buren vice presidential candidate, according to one Whig editor, had "*practically* illustrated his opposition to White."[33]

Yet there were other circumstances that aided Van Buren's candidacy in Mississippi. A tower of strength was Old Hickory's amaranthine popularity in the state. "General Jackson is in fact the candidate before the people," protested the Whig editor of the Liberty *Advocate*. "We hear his praises sung every where—His merits are extolled—His Administration applauded. His services are on their tongue's praises. . . . Who can deny but what Jackson is substantially the candidate?—By voting for Van Buren, you vote for General Jackson a third time."[34]

[31] Gwin to Van Buren, August 15, 1835, *ibid.;* Woodville *Republican,* October 31, 1835.

[32] Washington *Globe,* January 5, 1835; Vicksburg *Register,* April 9, 1835.

[33] Jackson *Mississippian,* October 2, 1835; Columbus *Southern Argus,* October 5, 1835.

[34] Quoted in Washington *Paul Pry,* July 23, 1836.

Another factor militating in Van Buren's favor was Mississippi's apparently never-ending prosperity. "The "Flush Times" continued, despite warnings, throughout 1836. The supporters of the "Little Magician" attributed the economic well-being of the state to the policies of the Democratic party and maintained that the election of their candidate would insure a continuance of the good times. One slogan used effectively during the campaign was:

Cotton is rising
Van Buren is coming!

Actually the presidential campaign in Mississippi was conducted in lackluster fashion; the senatorial contest of the previous year had kindled far more interest. "The Southerners are too much occupied [with] cotton and money to think about politics," wrote James D. Davidson, who visited Vicksburg on election day and found "no excitement" concerning the presidential race.[35]

The Whig strategy in 1836, designed to throw the presidential election into the House of Representatives, proved to be a boomerang in Mississippi. In the South Whig electoral candidates endorsed Senator White while in most northern states General William Henry Harrison of Ohio was the party's standard bearer. In a clear-cut race between Van Buren and White, it is probable that the latter would have carried Mississippi, for a large percentage of the recent immigrants to the state had come from Tennessee. The Democrats, however, pointed out that White could not be elected by the people even if he carried every state in which tickets pledged to him were presented to the electorate; and they charged that he was merely a stalking-horse for Harrison. Even the Whig Natchez *Courier* wrote in June that the "field is now clear—Harrison against Van Buren." But the hero of Tippecanoe, in the pre-log-cabin-and-hard-cider days, was not popular in Mississippi, and Democrats alleged that he, not Van Buren, was the abolitionist in the race. Henry S. Foote, who had strayed from the Van Buren fold the previous year, returned late in the campaign, declaring that White was no longer a candidate.[36]

All conceded that the election in Mississippi would be close. "I will not disguise the fact that I have my fears of the State," Samuel Gwin wrote Van Buren in late October. For several days after the balloting the outcome in Mississippi remained doubtful. When the final vote was tabulated Van Buren emerged the victor by a majority of only 500 votes out of almost 20,000 cast. The White ticket prevailed in the old Natchez District and the upper Pearl and Yazoo river counties,

[35] Jackson *Mississippian,* October 7, 1836; Kellar (ed.), "Diary of James D. Davidson," 357.

[36] Natchez *Free Trader,* October 29, 1836, quoting Natchez *Courier;* Vicksburg *Register,* November 3, 1836.

but the Democrats swept the piney woods and the eastern Choctaw and Chickasaw counties.[37]

Van Buren's victory in Mississippi (as indeed in the nation) was more attributable to his predecessor's popularity than to his own. In 1836 Jackson's prestige was at its zenith. His followers, long in control of the House of Representatives, recaptured the Senate soon after the election of Robert J. Walker to that body. The nation was experiencing an intoxicating period of economic inflation that aided the party in power. Thus despite doubts concerning Van Buren's views on slavery, the unpopularity of his vice presidential candidate, and the sentiment for White in the state, the New Yorker carried Mississippi by a narrow majority. Once elected president, however, he could no longer find shelter in Jackson's shadow from the attacks of his enemies. Already there were signs that the prosperity of the "Flush Times" would prove illusory: the Specie Circular of 1836 caused disquieting unrest in the West. Van Buren's shaky popularity was only as secure as the nation's equally precarious prosperity.

[37] Gwin to Van Buren, October 27, 1836, Van Buren Papers; Jackson *Mississippian,* December 22, 1836.

CHAPTER X

HARD TIMES

> "It . . . might be instructive to develop the financial and political history of Mississippi, during the period between the withdrawal of the branch of the United States Bank at Natchez and the final catastrophe of the Mississippi Union Bank."
>
> James H. Maury[1]

The speculative mania of the middle eighteen-thirties was not confined to the Southwest, but was prevalent in varying degrees throughout the nation. But in no state were its effects felt so profoundly as in Mississippi. Consequently when the "Flush Times" ended, as they did abruptly with the panic of 1837, no state experienced more disastrous financial reverses, for—in the words of Wiley P. Harris—"the attempt to create paper by chartering banks without any regard to the principles of banking or business . . . was carried further in Mississippi" than in any other state.[2]

By 1836 the banking system of the state was teetering on the brink of collapse, although this fact was not generally comprehended. The Planters' Bank and the Agricultural Bank, which as "pet" banks were entrusted with the proceeds from the record land sales of that era, were discounting recklessly. The closing of the Natchez branch of the Bank of the United States conferred a sense of urgency to the movement for new banking facilities; and the legislature of 1836 chartered several such institutions. In September, 1836, there were eleven authorized banks in the state with an aggregate potential capital of approximately $20 million.[3]

In June, 1836, Volney E. Howard, co-editor of the Jackson *Mississippian,* became alarmed at this trend. In a series of articles on "Banks and Banking" he criticized the Mississippi banks as "little else than brokers' shops, in the hands of a few speculators," from which the people of the state derived inconsiderable benefit. Conspicuous among the debtors to the banks, he charged, were the stockholders themselves—men who had indicated that they had surplus capital by purchasing stock. Howard contended that the directors and stockholders of the banks

[1] Percy Lee Rainwater (ed.), "The Autobiography of James H. Maury," *Journal of Mississippi History,* V (April, 1943), 98.

[2] "Autobiography of Wiley P. Harris," in Rowland, *Courts, Judges, and Lawyers of Mississippi,* 288.

[3] Natchez *Free Trader* (tri-weekly), September 10, 1836.

"form a sort of aristocratic association of borrowers, who do business upon other men's capital, and by playing into each others hands, succeed in monopolizing all the accommodations which the banking stocks can afford."[4]

Howard believed that one of the most iniquitous evils of the banks was that they tended to "extend and contract their operations at the very times when they should curtail or enlarge them." When the economy flourished, he pointed out, banks contributed to the inflationary trend through liberal loans; but when trade slumped and there was a clamorous demand for banking accommodations, they were powerless to render any service to the community. He expressed grave doubt that the banks, if tested, could meet their obligations in specie. Urging the directors to adopt a more prudent policy, he presaged the ruin of all the state's banks "unless some reformation takes place in the manner in which they are conducted." He also advocated that the state should regularly examine the condition and management of the banks.[5]

While Howard's monitory strictures were emanating from the columns of the *Mississippian,* Secretary of the Treasury Levi Woodbury issued, on July 11, the Specie Circular, requiring that receivers of public money accept only gold and silver in payment for public lands. The effects of the Treasury Order, as Jackson called it, were quickly perceived in Mississippi, where the demand for specie was soon insatiable. The Natchez *Courier* headlined a report of the action as "Another Executive Outrage" and anathematized "the old dotard who now fills the office of President of the United States." A public meeting at Clinton, where one of the land offices was located, protested the adoption of the new policy.[6]

As the Mississippi banks tightened their accommodations during late 1836, resentment against the Specie Circular mounted. In his message to the legislature in January, 1837, Governor Charles Lynch declared that the order, if retained, would be "extremely oppressive to our citizens." A committee of the House of Representatives recommended that Mississippi's senators be instructed to vote for its repeal, but before any action could be taken the legislature adjourned in late January amidst confusion involving the right of the Chickasaw counties to be represented at that session.[7]

In the second session of the Twenty-fourth Congress, Robert J. Walker, chairman of the Senate committee on public lands, led the

[4] Jackson *Mississippian,* June 24, 1836. For the relationship of Volney E. Howard to the *Mississippian* during the late eighteen-thirties see *ibid.,* August 11, 1837, and Columbus *Democrat,* September 5, 1840.

[5] Jackson *Mississippian,* June 24, July 1, 1836.

[6] Woodville *Republican,* August 13, 1836, quoting Natchez *Courier;* Jackson *Mississippian,* September 2, 1836.

[7] *Mississippi House Journal* (January, 1837), 45, 100.

fight for the repeal of the Treasury Order, although reasserting at the same time his loyalty to the Jackson administration. His stand led to an acrimonious controversy with "Old Bullion" himself, Senator Thomas Hart Benton, the actual author of the Specie Circular. "God save the country from the Committee on Public Lands," protested Benton. "God save us," replied Walker, "from the wild visionary, ruinous, and impracticable schemes of the Senator from Missouri, for exclusive gold and silver currency." The bill to repeal the unpopular Circular easily passed Congress—only four senators joined Benton in opposition—but Jackson killed the measure with a pocket veto in March, 1837.[8]

Of even more far-reaching consequence to Mississippi's economy was the passage of the Distribution or Deposit Act of 1836. The state's congressional representatives, with the exception of George Poindexter, had consistently opposed Henry Clay's proposal to distribute the proceeds from the sale of public lands among the states—on the grounds that such a program would preclude the chances of a pre-emption and graduation policy, would lead to a higher tariff, and would discriminate in favor of the more populous older states that had already benefited from earlier land sales. Yet by 1836 the advocates of distribution had a telling argument: since January 1, 1835, when the national debt had been liquidated, a surplus had been accumulating in the federal treasury. It was estimated that by January 1, 1837, this surplus would exceed $40 million.

As an alternative to Clay's program, John C. Calhoun proposed that the entire surplus in excess of $5 million be deposited among the states on the basis of their electoral vote. Many congressmen who were opposed to a permanent distribution program were willing to accept Calhoun's plan as a temporary expedient. Senator Robert J. Walker, however, opposed the measure in the Senate and advocated a reduction of the surplus by lowering the minimum price of public lands. He and his colleague, John Black, were among the little band of six senators who opposed the distribution measure. On June 23, 1836, President Jackson, with an eye on the forthcoming presidential campaign, reluctantly signed the bill. Although the act specified that the money was "to be returned when the wants of the government shall require it," it was understood that it would never be called for. The act provided that the money should be distributed among the states in four quarterly payments beginning January 1, 1837.[9]

[8] *Congressional Globe,* 24 Cong., 2 Sess., 216; Raynor G. Wellington, *The Political and Sectional Influence of the Public Lands, 1828-1842* (New York, 1914), 55-56.

[9] Walker to editors of Jackson *Mississippian,* June 17, 1836, in Columbus *Democrat,* August 6, 1836; *Congressional Globe,* 24 Cong., 1 Sess., 451; Edward G. Bourne, *The History of the Surplus Revenue of 1837, Being an Account of Its Origin, Its Distribution among the States, and the Uses to Which It was Applied* (New York, 1885), *passim.*

During 1835 and 1836 more than $6 million, consisting primarily of notes issued by southwestern banks which had been garnered by the federal land offices in Mississippi, were deposited in the Planters' and Agricultural Banks. Under the Distribution Act Mississippi was to receive only $509,780.41; consequently there would be a drastic drain of currency from the state during 1837. Mississippi's "pet" banks had been encouraged by the presence of the government deposits in their vaults to grant injudicious loans. Now under the terms of the Distribution Act they were required to honor government drafts on all sections of the country upon short notice. As a result their accommodations were sharply reduced and loans were called in at an alarming rate. In order to facilitate the transfer of funds from one section of the country to another, the Agricultural Bank invested in mercantile bills or bank checks on northern cities and New Orleans. When these were dishonored by the failure of several mercantile houses and banks in early 1837, the Natchez bank sustained excessive losses.[10]

On March 31, 1837, Governor Lynch called a special session of the legislature for April 17 to consider the "pecuniary embarrassment of the community." In his message he expressed the hope that relief measures without impairing the obligation of contracts would be passed "to quiet and put at rest any erroneous apprehension that may have gone abroad, calculated to weaken the confidence so justly due to the high character of the State and its institutions." Yet before the legislature adjourned, the apprehension had materially intensified. On May 4 the Agricultural Bank suspended specie payments and the Planters' Bank did likewise on the following day. Within a month most of the banks of the nation had adopted a similar course.[11]

Although some Mississippians considered the Distribution Act as the immediate cause of the state's financial embarrassment, most residents of the state tended to attribute the panic to the Specie Circular. President Martin Van Buren was implored to rescind the unpopular order that the Old Hero had authorized. "Our distress," Representative J. F. H. Claiborne wrote the President, "may be imputed to many causes; to the inordinate spirit of speculation; to the enormous and unavailable sums laid out for lands; to the high prices of slaves; to our systems of extended credits and of factorage, but more than all, to the Treasury Order." The Mississippi legislators, sharing Claiborne's views, approved a resolution declaring "that the best interests of these United States will be promoted, by the immediate rescinding of the

[10] *Financial Register of the United States: Devoted Chiefly to Finance and Currency, and to Banking and Commercial Statistics,* 2 vols. (Philadelphia, 1837-1838), I (November 8, 1837), 150; *Mississippi House Journal* (1840), 399.

[11] *Mississippi House Journal* (April, 1837), 3-4, 14; Hogan and Davis (eds.), *William Johnson's Natchez,* 175-76; *Niles' Register,* LII (May, 1837), 144-208, *passim.*

treasury order, commonly known as the specie circular." Nevertheless Van Buren remained firm, despite this and similar protests from other western states.[12]

Faced with the unhappy failure of her existing banks, Mississippi attempted to cope with the sudden emergency by the dubious expedient of creating still more banks. During the special session several such institutions were chartered, increasing the total authorized banking capital of the state by several million dollars. In order to permit the new banks to begin operations as quickly as possible, the legislature permitted them to issue post notes, *i.e.,* promises to pay at a specified later date, which were to be received by the state for taxes and indebtedness.[13]

The legislature also passed an act creating three bank commissioners who were required to conduct an annual examination of the condition of the state banks, with authority to appeal to the Court of Chancery for an injunction against any insolvent institution. E. F. Calhoun, James McLaran, and Lorenzo A. Besançon were elected commissioners for two-year terms. Besançon, the best known of the trio, was editor of the Natchez *Free Trader,* which now rivaled the Jackson *Mississippian* as the leading Democratic organ in the state.[14]

On May 15, following the suspension of specie payments by the New York banks, President Van Buren summoned a special session of Congress to meet in September. The United States, like the state of Mississippi, struggled with acute fiscal problems as a result of the banks' failure to redeem their notes in specie: the government had no safe depositories for its funds; the surplus revenue was nonexistent; and the circulating medium of the nation had been seriously impaired. It was an inauspicious beginning for the Van Buren administration.

Under ordinary circumstances Mississippi's representatives for the Twenty-fifth Congress would not have been chosen until November, 1837, one month prior to the time of the convening of the regular session. In order that the state might be represented at the September session, Governor Lynch issued a proclamation calling for a special election in July and stipulating that the candidates chosen at that time would serve only until the regular November election, when representatives for the full term would be selected.[15]

The Democratic incumbents, J. F. H. Claiborne and Samuel J. Gholson (who had defeated John A. Quitman the previous year for the vacancy caused by the death of David Dickson) consented to stand for re-election. The Whigs proposed Seargent S. Prentiss and A. L. Acee. Prentiss was not in Mississippi during the entire campaign and

[12] Woodville *Republican,* April 8, 1837; Claiborne to Van Buren, April 10, 1837, Van Buren Papers; *Mississippi Session Laws* (April, 1837), 365-66.
[13] *Mississippi Session Laws* (April, 1837), 175-78.
[14] *Ibid.,* 217-21; *Mississippi House Journal* (April, 1837), 233.
[15] Jackson *Mississippian,* June 16, 1837.

Acee was little known in the state. Consequently Claiborne and Gholson won a relatively easy victory.

When the special session convened on September 4, the question of the legality of the Mississippi election was raised. With the parties almost equal in strength (James K. Polk was elected Speaker by a scant Democratic majority of three votes) the two Mississippi seats were prizes worth contesting. The Whigs asserted that the governor had no right to authorize a special election while the Democrats claimed that Claiborne and Gholson had been elected for the entire Congress. By a strict party vote the two Democrats were proclaimed the "duly elected members of the twenty-fifth Congress from the State of Mississippi."[16]

When the decision of the House of Representatives was announced, preparations were well underway in Mississippi for the congressional election in November to choose representatives for the full term. On the day following the opening of the special session, Prentiss had announced as a candidate. Thomas J. Word was later designated as his running mate on the Whig ticket. Claiborne and Gholson, serving in Washington, could not have campaigned actively had they chosen to do so, and they now declared that the proposed election was illegal in view of the House's action in seating them for the full term. On the other hand, the Whigs, who charged that Congress had no right to dictate to Mississippi concerning the election of her representatives, succeeded in winning public opinion to their side. Under such circumstances Prentiss and Word triumphed in the November election. During the following session, after an eloquent plea from Prentiss (by then acclaimed as one of the nation's foremost orators), the House rescinded its earlier action and ordered a new election to be held in April, 1838. Prentiss and Word easily defeated Claiborne and James Davis, the latter replacing Gholson on the Democratic ticket.[17]

Thus ended the story of one of the most controversial episodes of the Twenty-fifth Congress. During the entire affair Claiborne and Gholson were burdened with troublesome encumbrances: they were forced to stand for re-election at a time when they could not be in Mississippi; both suffered from illness during most of the congressional struggle over their right to be seated; and the continuing bad times adversely affected the party in power. But their course in refusing to recognize the legality of the November election did not win the universal approval of their own party. In addition, Claiborne's equivocal stand on

[16] *Congressional Globe,* 25 Cong., 1 Sess., 99.

[17] A thorough coverage of the Mississippi disputed election may be found in Dallas C. Dickey, *Seargent S. Prentiss: Whig Orator of the Old South* (Baton Rouge, 1946), 96-131 .

the question of a new national bank did little to strengthen his political prestige.[18]

With the panic of 1837 the campaign for a new national bank temporarily gained many adherents in Mississippi. During the canvass for the special session, Claiborne, "in a moment of excitement and sympathy for the general distress, . . . yielded with many of my own party to the belief that a bank, of a certain character, was necessary." In private correspondence and conversation he advocated as an immediate step "depositing the public funds in the U. S. Bank of Pennsylvania, which will give us at *once* a permanent and uniform currency." According to Henry S. Foote, Claiborne allegedly declared that "there must be an inevitable severance between the exclusive metallic currency Democrats, alias the Locofocos, and those who went for a well restricted credit system." Claiborne subsequently altered his views on the subject of a national bank; nevertheless he had alienated many of his party.[19]

At the special session of Congress in September, 1837, President Van Buren presented his plan for the establishment of the independent treasury system. The panic of 1837 had made manifest the inefficacy of the "pet" banking system. On the other hand, Van Buren could not yield to the pressure for a new national bank without repudiating the Jackson program. In recommending that the "collection, safekeeping, transfer and disbursement of the public money" be conducted by officers of the government rather than through the agency of banks, the President embraced the program of the "Locofocos," a term originally applied to the radical wing of the New York Democracy, but later used to designate the advocates of "hard money." The Whigs earnestly deprecated Van Buren's proposal of a divorce of bank and state as a continuation of the war against the entire banking system and a step toward the establishment of an exclusively metallic system of exchange. Under the independent treasury system, the removal of public funds from the banks would reduce the amount of specie on which notes could be issued; it would also reduce the power of banks over the currency by rejecting bank notes in payment of governmental obligations. Furthermore it would necessitate the appointment of additional federal officers subject to the presidential patronage.[20]

In 1837 Mississippians were not disposed to support the Locofoco program. Instead of opposing the existing banking system, their legislature chartered several new banks, authorized the issuance of

[18] Samuel Gwin to Van Buren, October 25, 1837, Van Buren Papers; Jackson *Mississippian,* October 27, 1837.

[19] Columbus *Southern Argus,* June 27, 1837; Claiborne to G. S. Fitler, July 1, 1837, in *ibid.,* October 17, 1837; Raymond *Times,* September 1, November 10, 1837; Vicksburg *Register,* September 6, 1837.

[20] David Kinley, *The Independent Treasury System of the United States and Its Relation to the Banks of the Country* (Washington, 1910), 33-41; Schlesinger, *Age of Jackson,* 525-27; Hammond, *Banks and Politics,* 542-45.

post notes, and endorsed the rescission of the Specie Circular, an order cherished by the advocates of "hard money." Many of the citizens of the state were hopelessly indebted and looked to an extension of banking accommodations as the means of their salvation.

The Mississippi Democracy was sorely divided on the question of banking. "In one place we find *hard-money* democrats, in another, *Treasury draft* democrats—in a third *old Jackson* democrats—in a fourth, we find the *National Bank* democrats, etc. etc.," commented one Whig editor. In June Benjamin W. Edwards of Hinds County, who had entered the gubernatorial race that spring with the blessing of the Jackson *Mississippian,* announced in favor of a new national bank. "The idea of reducing us to a gold and silver currency alone," he said, "I consider preposterous and extreme." In the fall campaign Henry S. Foote left the Democratic party—for the second time in two years—with a vehement blast against Locofocoism.[21]

Yet the "hard-money Democrats" were not without their advocates in Mississippi. In May, 1837, Volney E. Howard resumed his articles on "Banks and Banking" in the columns of the *Mississippian.* "We go for radical reform," he announced. When Edwards declared his support of a national bank, the *Mississippian* promptly repudiated him, denouncing "politicians who have once shouted Jackson for popularity's sake, but now that he is reclining on his laurels at the Hermitage, think they can play truant to his principles with safety." "When the issue is put to us between a national bank and an exclusive metal[l]ic currency," Howard had written earlier, "we freely avow ourselves in favor of the hard money policy."[22]

Reiterating his earlier charges that the banks were operated for the exclusive benefit of speculators, Howard urged that the legislature limit the maximum liability of individuals to a bank, proposed a reduction of the rate of discount, and called for an investigation of the Planters' and Agricultural Banks. He also demanded that the banks redeem their five-dollar notes because silver was fast disappearing from circulation. "We can assure the banks of this State," he warned, "that there is a current fast setting against them."[23]

Samuel Gwin, although forced by ill health to play a less active role in politics, gave Van Buren his usual loyal support in the campaign for the divorce of bank and state. "I have made arrangements to have your first message reprinted," he wrote in August, "as soon as the first copy reaches Nashville & will have them circulated by runners thro' all the northern part of the State of Mi[ssissippi] where there is no mail facilities. . . . I shall pass down thro the centre of the State & will fling

[21] Jackson *Southern Whig,* August 16, 1837; Jackson *Mississippian,* July 28, 1837; Clinton *Gazette,* November 4, 1837.
[22] Jackson *Mississippian,* May 5, June 9, August 11, 1837.
[23] *Ibid.,* May 5, 26, 1837.

them into every neighborhood." In such a manner Gwin distributed ten thousand copies of Van Buren's message. In October he again wrote the President, endorsing the plan for the independent treasury. "How can a Southern man, who looks a little beyond the little party strife of the day," he wrote, "be in favour of a United States Bank, or be opposed to the divorcing of the United States from all banks?" But Gwin's loyalty was undoubtedly more to the national Democratic party than to hard-money principles; at any rate, shortly before his death in 1838 he accepted the lucrative office of cashier of the Mississippi Union Bank.[24]

The administration's proposal for an independent treasury system afforded an opportunity for the return of John C. Calhoun to the Democratic ranks, an impossibility as long as the Old Hero had been in the White House. The South Carolinian had long been an unhappy associate (he never considered himself a member) of the anti-Jackson coalition dominated by the nationalistic wing of the Whig party—the advocates of a national bank, the American System, and a broad construction of the Constitution. Calhoun, believing that the South's only hope lay in a state rights interpretation of the Constitution, seized upon the independent treasury proposal as a means of checking northern capitalism and fortifying the constitutional position of his region. Much to the dismay of the Whigs, Calhoun became virtually the administration leader in the Senate during the fight for the divorce of bank and state.[25]

Calhoun's stand did not result in an immediate union of his followers with the Democrats. In Mississippi, on the contrary, all of the presses formerly pledged to the cause of nullification—with the exception of Doctor James Hagan's Vicksburg *Sentinel*—supported the campaign for a new national bank and denounced the proposed independent treasury. "The opposition would have overturned the administration with . . . [Calhoun]," declared the editor of the Raymond *Times*, "and they will overturn it without him."[26]

In the fall of 1837 party lines were obscured in Mississippi. In the congressional race the old Nullifiers generally favored Prentiss and Word, despite their open advocacy of a new national bank. Even John A. Quitman, Calhoun's stalwart lieutenant in the state, presided at a Natchez meeting that endorsed the Whig candidates.[27] It was not easy for the Mississippi Nullifiers to sever old alliances.

The gubernatorial race presented a different situation. Neither party nominated candidates by a convention that year; the cry of

[24] Gwin to Van Buren, August 30, October 25, 1837, Van Buren Papers; *Mississippi House Journal* (1839), 170.
[25] Wiltse, *John C. Calhoun, Nullifier*, 343-61.
[26] Raymond *Times*, December 22, 1837.
[27] Woodville *Republican*, September 16, 1837.

"caucus" was still reverberating from the campaigns of 1835 and 1836. M. F. DeGraffenreid of Wilkinson, Benjamin W. Edwards of Hinds, and Alexander G. McNutt—all Democrats announced as candidates. In July Edwards disconcerted many of his followers by his vociferous stand for a national bank. Only his death in August prevented a serious breach in the Democratic ranks.

When DeGraffenreid withdrew from the canvass, the Democratic mantle fell on McNutt, "a man of huge bulk . . . [who] exhibited in a very striking manner all the ordinary indications of good living." A wealthy Vicksburg lawyer and planter, he was thirty-five years old, a native of Virginia who had moved to Mississippi in 1823. Prior to 1835, when he was elected to the state Senate from a normally Whig district, he had never sought public office. In January, 1837, he became president of the Senate. McNutt had originally endorsed former Governor Hiram G. Runnels as the Democratic gubernatorial candidate in 1837; when Runnels declined, he became the unofficial choice of the Democratic legislators for the honor.[28]

Although the Nullifiers supported the Whig candidates for Congress, they acted independently in the gubernatorial race. At first it appeared that the two factions would unite on John A. Grimball, who had been secretary of state for almost twelve years and had served as a White elector in 1836. But Grimball angered the State Rights faction by denouncing nullification in an address to the public. Quitman was urged to enter the race but declined to do so. The Nullifiers then threw their support to Jacob M. Morgan of Hinds County. Thus while the Democrats were uniting behind McNutt, their opponents were splitting into two camps.[29]

In his campaign McNutt imputed the state's economic ills to "our own bad habits, our extravagance, our reckless speculations, and overtrading brought on, and stimulated to excess by the imprudent over-issues of the banks." He contended that relief could be found "only in a reform of our habits, in laying aside the chimerical notion of getting rich without labor, and returning to the good old paths of industry which our ancestors followed." He ridiculed "the idea of *legislating* ourselves out of our difficulties . . . as preposterous, and utterly subversive of the fundamental principles of our government."[30]

With the opposition divided, McNutt won an easy victory in the November election, although he obtained only a minority of the total votes cast. Nevertheless the results manifested the weakness of the

[28] Foote, *Casket of Reminiscences,* 198-209; Columbus *Democrat,* November 4, 1837.

[29] Natchez *Courier and Journal* (weekly), August 25, 1837; Woodville *Republican,* September 2, 16, 1837; Preston W. Farrar to Quitman, August 26, 1837, Claiborne Papers, Jackson.

[30] Columbus *Democrat,* August 26, 1837.

nationalistic wing of the Whig party in the state: McNutt received 12,637 votes; Morgan, 9,780; while Grimball, who supported the movement for a new national bank, received only 4,583 ballots. The Democrats also captured a majority of both houses of the legislature, assuring the election of their candidate, James F. Trotter of Lowndes, as United States senator to complete the unexpired term of John Black, who resigned in January, 1838.[31]

Throughout 1837 financial depression continued to grip Mississippi. In June a meeting in Hinds County urged the calling of a new constitutional convention. The advocates of this movement—Henry S. Foote was one of them—were vague concerning their specific goals, but they probably anticipated the amendment of the constitution to permit the issuance of bonds for direct loans to the people. About the same time the citizens of Natchez held an angry protest meeting against the Postmaster General's order requiring the payment of postage in advance. "Times are very dull," Seargent S. Prentiss wrote in August. "There is not a dollar of money in circulation and no business doing." William Johnson, the free Negro barber of Natchez, was equally gloomy. In October he wrote: "Business quite Dull as usual—Never, never in all my life, did I Ever see such times in Natchez before—What in the world is the town Coming to [?]"[32]

The banks created in 1836 and 1837 failed to profit from the unfortunate mistakes of their predecessors. Most notorious of the new institutions was the Mississippi and Alabama Railroad Company with headquarters at Brandon. The "Brandon Bank"—as it was popularly called—had been chartered in 1836 with an authorized capital of $4 million for the avowed purpose "of constructing and erecting a rail-road from the town of Jackson, in the state of Mississippi, to the city of Mobile, in the state of Alabama." From the very beginning, however, the directorate made no pretense of railroad-building and disregarded every principle of sound banking. Its capital was largely subscribed not through specie as required by its charter but through notes backed by mortgages on real estate.[33]

Since the bank had commenced activity only a few months before the nationwide suspension of specie payments, it continued operations by issuing post notes at twelve months in accordance with the law passed by the Mississippi legislature in the spring of 1837. Most of the landowners of the state had already mortgaged their real estate; consequently

[31] Jackson *Mississippian,* December 1, 1837; *Mississippi House Journal* (1838), 184-85.

[32] Natchez *Courier and Journal* (weekly), June 14, 1837; Woodville *Republican,* June 10, 17, 1837; Prentiss (ed.), *Memoir of S. S. Prentiss,* I, 225; Hogan and Davis (eds.), *William Johnson's Natchez,* 199.

[33] *Mississippi Session Laws* (1836), 152-65; *Financial Register,* II (October 24, 1838), 266.

the Brandon Bank attempted to relieve the distress by advancing accommodations to planters on their anticipated cotton crops. Other banks soon adopted the same practice and the 1837 Mississippi crop was for the most part consigned to the state's banks rather than the New Orleans commission merchants. The Mississippi and Alabama Railroad Company established agencies at several points "on the Mississippi, Yazoo, and Pearl Rivers, which were supplied with funds to advance all the powers of a bank of discount, thus giving a locomotive character or the principle of ubiquity to the Brandon Bank."[34]

Most Mississippians, whose resentment of the state's commercial dependence on the Crescent City had been augmented by the hard times, enthusiastically applauded the purchase of cotton by the banks. "We have been plucked by strangers long enough," said the editor of the Rodney *Standard*. "If there be more to be done let us pluck each other." Planters were particularly pleased with the price paid by the Brandon Bank—approximately twelve cents per pound, although, to be sure, in post notes. A "Nick Biddle of the South" had been found. Even the *Mississippian,* hostile to most of the state's banks, defended the Brandon institution with more than ordinary vigor.[35]

Nevertheless time demonstrated the folly of the bank's course, which benefited neither its stockholders nor the people. In 1838 the price of cotton fell disastrously and by July the average price per pound at New Orleans was only 8.3 cents. In addition, much of the cotton promised to the bank was not delivered. As the time drew near when the post notes of the institution were to fall due, the bank's predicament became perilous. It could foreclose on the mortgages held as security for stock, but this process would be protracted and tedious. And who in 1838 had specie with which to buy real estate? In June, after several thousands of Brandon notes had been protested in New Orleans, a Louisiana court order authorized the seizure of the bank's cotton in the city's warehouses. In September the workmen building the new Capitol in Jackson balked at receiving Brandon money, then circulating at 30 to 40 per cent discount. By October the bank reportedly had liabilities of $7 million and only $39,000 in specie.[36]

The failure of the Brandon Bank's policy was not yet apparent when the Mississippi legislature met in January, 1838. In his valedictory Governor Charles Lynch declined to sanction the views of his chosen successor that legislation could not bring relief to the people; unlike

[34] *Financial Register,* II (October 24, 1838), 266.

[35] Rodney *Standard,* December 12, 1837; *Financial Register,* I (January 17, 1838), 237; *Mississippi House Journal* (1842), 853-54; Jackson *Mississippian,* February 2, April 27, 1838.

[36] Lewis Cecil Gray, *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States to 1860,* 2 vols. (Washington, 1933), II, 1027; *Financial Register,* II (October 3, 1838), 219-20, (October 24, 1838), 265-68; Jackson *Mississippian,* September 7, 1838; *Mississippi House Journal* (1839), 118-20.

McNutt, he was not "disposed to indulge in cold unfeeling lectures upon industry and economy, when many of our fellow citizens are about to be stripped of their last pittance." Lynch advocated a new national bank—not because of its advantages to the state but rather because it was indispensable to the national welfare. "If there is one State in the Union above all others," he said, "that can dispense with such an institution it is Mississippi. Our great staple commodity furnishes the means by which the issues of a powerful State Bank, properly organized and backed by the credit of the State, could be made to supersede, to a great extent, the necessity of a National Bank."[37]

Lynch's statement concerning a "powerful State Bank" was a reference to the proposed Union Bank of Mississippi. In 1835 Governor Runnels had urged the establishment of a bank similar to that of the Union Bank of Louisiana in order to augment the banking capital of the state following the imminent closing of the Natchez branch of the United States Bank. The proposal met with favor from Jacksonians and Whigs alike. In 1836 one legislator endorsed the measure as a means of reducing the economic dependence of the state upon the New Orleans commercial interests—a condition "too humiliating for the rich and productive state of Mississippi to endure."[38]

In February, 1836, the House of Representatives overwhelmingly passed the Union Bank Bill by a vote of 49 to 7. At an adjourned session of the same legislature, in January, 1837, the Senate endorsed the bill, but by a smaller margin—11 to 8, with greater Democratic than Whig support for the measure. Since the bill proposed that the credit of the state be pledged as security for the bank's capital stock, the approval of two successive legislatures was required for confirmation of the charter. The Union Bank question loomed as a major issue before the legislature of 1838.[39]

In 1838 advocates of the Union Bank controlled both houses of the legislature. Although the Democrats possessed a majority in both House and Senate, it was Whig strength that enabled the bill to pass a second time. In the House eighteen Democrats and thirty-five Whigs approved the measure, while twenty-seven Democrats and only six Whigs were opposed. In the Senate the results were similar: ten Whigs joined seven Democrats in support of the bill, with ten Democrats and two Whigs voting in the negative.[40]

When the bill passed the Senate, Senators Hanson Alsbury and Tilghman M. Tucker registered a formal protest, declaring that the

[37] *Mississippi House Journal* (1838), 26, 35.
[38] *Ibid.* (1835), 45; Woodville *Republican,* February 13, 1836.
[39] *Mississippi House Journal* (January, 1837), 153-54; *Mississippi Senate Journal* (January, 1837), 95.
[40] *Mississippi House Journal* (1838), 187-88; *Mississippi Senate Journal* (1838), 207.

proposed bank would operate "for the exclusive benefit of the lordly landholder, the reckless speculator, and the whole host of nonproducers, including an army of presidents, cashiers, clerks, commissioners and other drones in society, too lazy to earn their support by honest industry." The Jackson *Mississippian* also denounced the bill: "If it ever should go into operation, the Union Bank will rule this State, its Government and people, with a rod of iron." The very thought of its adoption, declared the *Mississippian,* "should make every man shudder."[41]

As state senator in 1837 Alexander G. McNutt had opposed the Union Bank bill; yet as governor in 1838 he approved the measure. The *Mississippian* regretted his decision but hoped for the best: "Let us give it a fair trial and do it no injustice. If contrary to our expectations, it shall answer the ends for which it has been instituted, we shall be rejoiced; if it does not, we shall not fail to raise our voice against it upon all occasions." The Union Bank, Volney E. Howard later said, "was one of those subjects upon which the people, or rather the legislature, had run mad, and the spirit of paper money ruled the hour." McNutt did not attempt to stem the tide.[42]

Yet the governor was unyielding in his opposition to other banking measures recommended by the legislature of 1838. His veto of a bill sanctioning the issuance of post notes was overridden, but his disapprobation of the proposed charters of the Columbus Real Estate Bank, the Yazoo Railroad Company, and the Yalobusha and Tallahatchie Railroad and Banking Company was sustained. In refusing his assent to these charters, he declared that "these are times to be met, not followed. I cannot cooperate with the Legislature in chartering more banks—more especially when they are based upon principles eminently calculated to depreciate still more the currency." Yet he had already approved the Union Bank bill, authorizing a banking institution with a capital of $15½ million—with the credit of the state pledged as security. "While he valiantly strained at gnats," one critic later said, "he complacently swallowed a camel at a gulp." And the *Mississippian,* usually friendly to the governor, expressed the opinion that "if his course is liable to any reflection, it is that he did not begin quite early enough, his resistance to this mad spirit of lawless banking."[43]

At the same session the bank commissioners appointed by the 1837 legislature made their report. Of the twenty-eight banks and branches in operation throughout the state, seventeen had been critically examined.

[41] *Mississippi Senate Journal* (1838), 228-29; Jackson *Mississippian,* January 12, 1838.

[42] Jackson *Mississippian,* February 16, December 28, 1838.

[43] *Mississippi House Journal* (1838), 424-25, 433; *Mississippi Senate Journal* (1838), 347-48; Jennings, *Nine Years of Democratic Rule in Mississippi,* 19; Jackson *Mississippian,* February 23, 1838.

The two largest institutions, the Agricultural Bank and the Planters' Bank, had declined to co-operate; such an inquiry, they charged, was repugnant to their charters. Despite Albert Gallatin Brown's assertion that the investigation "shows our Banks to be in splendid condition with perhaps one or two exceptions," the report lay bare the distressing plight of the state's banking institutions. Less than one half of the authorized capital of the banks had been subscribed—and only a small proportion of that in specie; and the ratio of coin owned by the banks to their circulation and deposits was 1 to 15. Although the commissioners criticized alleged favors to a few commission merchants, the staggering liabilities of some directors, and the refusal of certain banks to establish branches required by law, their report was generally sympathetic toward the banks. Too sympathetic, thought the *Mississippian,* for "it had a most injurious influence upon the Legislature, giving as it did a fresh impetus to the spirit of rotten banking which then pervaded both branches of our legislative assembly." In urging a banking policy, the commissioners advised caution, because, as they asserted, "the fate of the people and the fate of the banks are at the present time identical." Consequently they proposed that the banks be given until August 1, 1839, to resume the payment of specie. Under this plan, those banks unable to do so would then be required to surrender their charters and wind up their affairs, while those that could resume would be subjected to scrupulous regulation by the state.[44]

On the other hand, Governor McNutt urged a more stringent policy toward the banks. Pointing out that they had violated their charters by the suspension of specie payments, he demanded that a general banking law be enacted to bring them under strict control. He recommended that no bank be permitted to declare a dividend until it had resumed specie payments, that the capital of each institution be reduced to the amount actually paid in, and that the banks be compelled to resume specie payments before November, 1838, or to surrender their charters.[45]

The legislators (many of whom were bank directors) did not choose to adopt either the course of action urged by the bank commissioners or that proposed by the governor. It contented itself with the passage of the Union Bank bill and the extension of the post-note system. On the whole, the lawmakers were pleased with their accomplishments. Adam L. Bingaman, Whig president of the Senate, congratulated that

[44] *Mississippi House Journal* (1838), 138 ff.; Brown to W. Eagen, January 28, 1838, Albert Gallatin Brown Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History; Jackson *Mississippian,* April 27, 1838.

[45] *Mississippi House Journal* (1838), 129-37.

body for demonstrating "confidence in the safety, utility, and permanence of our State institutions."[46]

Thus as the depression that had begun in 1837 continued its course, Mississippians still looked to the recovery of their fortunes in an expansion of their already disintegrating credit system. To be sure, there were protests against the policies adopted by the state. Perhaps the most vocal critic was Volney E. Howard, the guiding spirit of the Jackson *Mississippian* during the late eighteen-thirties. Yet Howard was not altogether consistent. While denouncing the Agricultural and Planters' Banks, he defended the Brandon Bank until the activities of that institution had utterly ruined its credit. It took him some time to divert his attacks against banks in particular to the banking system itself.

The future course of Mississippi politics depended largely upon the success or failure of the Union Bank, for whose sake the credit of the state had been pledged. If that institution could lift Mississippi from the throes of depression, as many persons fervently believed, the wildcat banking system would in some measure be vindicated. Unfortunately the Union Bank could hardly have commenced operations under less favorable circumstances. With a directorate sadly ignorant of the principles of banking, it faced unprecedented demands for accommodations as well as the jealousy and hostility of the older state banks. If it could not overcome these obstacles, then—as the *Mississippian* predicted—it would likely "convulse the whole State in less than 5 years, and be swept away like the spurious and rotten banks of Kentucky."[47] Eighteen thirty-nine promised to be a crucial year.

[46] *Financial Register,* II (July 18, 1838), 41-42; *Mississippi Senate Journal* (1838), 382.

[47] Jackson *Mississippian,* January 12, 1838.

CHAPTER XI

THE BARGAIN OF 1839

> "It is usually much easier to borrow and spend money than to provide the means of payment."
>
> Alexander G. McNutt[1]

> "We [the Nullifiers] now have the Administration powerless. Had we not better keep them in our power than to arm the Nationals for our destruction?"
>
> T. B. J. Hadley[2]

Eighteen thirty-eight was a catastrophic year for the Mississippi Democracy. Bad times continued, adversely affecting the party that controlled the national and state administrations. In the spring Whigs Prentiss and Word won an easy victory over Claiborne and Davis in the election that finally decided the disputed congressional representation. Private scandals also hurt the party. Gordon D. Boyd, who had succeeded the defaulting Wiley P. Harris as receiver of public lands at Columbus, proved to be equally negligent in his affairs. It was also revealed that John H. Mallory, late state auditor, was over $50,000 short in his accounts.[3]

More than anything else, the party lacked leadership. The Columbus *Democrat* declared that the disastrous congressional defeat was due to the fact that "there was no organization, no concert of action; no united and vigorous exertion to call out the party in its full force." Samuel Gwin, who had usually attended to these matters in the past, never fully recovered from the wounds suffered in his duel with Isaac Caldwell and died in July, 1838. In Washington ill health forced the prolonged absence of Robert J. Walker from the United States Senate and at one time it was seriously doubted that he would ever be able to resume his seat. His colleague, James F. Trotter, "heartily tired of political life," resigned in October to accept an appointment on the High Court of Errors and Appeals. Through resignations and deflections the Democratic majority in the legislature was wiped out by the time the adjourned session of that body met in January, 1839.[4]

[1] *Mississippi House Journal* (1839), 19.

[2] Hadley to John A. Quitman, June 28, 1838, Claiborne Papers, Jackson.

[3] Woodville *Republican,* June 30, 1838; Jackson *Mississippian,* November 16, 1838.

[4] Columbus *Democrat,* May 19, 1838; Jackson *Mississippian,* August 3, 1838; Pontotoc *Mississippi Intelligencer,* July 17, 1838; Trotter to Governor Alexander G. McNutt, October 30, 1838, Governors' Papers, Series E, No. 32, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

In the legislature of 1839 the State Rights faction held the balance of power. If the Nullifiers cooperated with the Whigs, as they had done in the congressional elections of 1837 and 1838, an anti-Van Buren candidate would be elected to succeed Trotter as United States senator; if they acted independently, as they had done in the gubernatorial election of 1837, or if they united with the Democrats, an administration supporter might be chosen. Throughout 1838 the leaders of the Mississippi Nullifiers were deliberating among themselves the future role of their faction. Should they continue to act with the Whigs, as they had done generally since 1834, or should they follow Calhoun's example on the national level by joining forces with the state Democratic party?

"It is to be feared," James Hagan (who now echoed Calhoun's support of the independent treasury system in the columns of the Vicksburg *Sentinel*) wrote John A. Quitman, "that many of our State Rights men will forget their principles in their opposition to men, unless these principles are frequently recurred to, and applied to the measures of all parties aspiring to the control of the federal government." T. B. J. Hadley, state senator from Hinds County, recognized the possibility of committing the Democratic party to the doctrines of the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions in exchange for the collaboration of the Nullifiers. Thomas Harney, also of Hinds County, suggested to Quitman the advisability of making common cause with the administration forces. "Can we make . . . [Calhoun] the successor of Van Buren?" he queried. But Samuel B. Marsh, college mate and friend of Calhoun, urged the Nullifiers to refuse to merge with the Democrats.[5]

The Democrats ardently wooed the Nullifiers. In August a "Union Meeting" of the Democratic and State Rights party was held in Hinds County, with T. B. J. Hadley presiding. Hadley's Whig constituents countered with a rally at which they demanded his resignation and protested against the Democrats' "pretended union of sentiment with the State Rights party." Nevertheless "Union Meetings" were subsequently arranged in several other counties. In October the *Mississippian* revealed the extent to which the Democrats would go to obtain the support of the State Rights faction by declaring that Quitman, Hadley, or Cotesworth P. Smith, all Nullifiers, would be acceptable candidates for Congress.[6]

Yet it was apparent in January, 1839, that a majority of the Nullifiers was not inclined to embrace their former Jacksonian enemies. On January 30 the legislature met in joint session to choose a United

[5] Hagan to Quitman, May 29, 1838, Hadley to Quitman, June 28, 1838, Harney to Quitman, December 10, 1838, Claiborne Papers, Jackson; Woodville *Republican*, October 13, 1838. Despite his initial attitude, Marsh rejoined the Democratic party in 1839. *Ibid.*, June 1, 1839.

[6] Lexington *Standard*, September 8, 1838; Woodville *Republican*, October 13, 1838; Jackson *Mississippian*, October 12, 19, 26, November 2, 9, 23, 1838.

States senator for the seat recently vacated by Trotter. Although the Democrats demonstrated a willingness to cast their ballots for Cotesworth P. Smith instead of Thomas Hickman Williams, to whom Governor McNutt had given an interim appointment, the State Rights legislators generally supported John Henderson, the Whig candidate. Henderson was accordingly elected for the six-year term while Williams was chosen to complete Trotter's term, which expired on March 4. Even Hadley (who probably accepted instructions from his constituents) voted for Henderson.[7]

As the depression entered its third year, banking matters continued to overshadow political developments in Mississippi. In late 1838 there had been a concerted national drive looking towards an early resumption of specie payments by banks throughout the Union. In August the *Financial Register* predicted that all states would resume by New Year's Day, with the exception of Mississippi, "which may hold out possibly until July next." Under the sponsorship of the Union Bank a state banking convention, attended by delegates from nineteen institutions, met in Vicksburg on November 5. The convention proposed that a new meeting be held in December to authorize a resumption of specie payments on January 1, 1839. Yet at the December meeting the Union Bank, while promising to redeem its post notes in northern funds at the current rate of exchange, would not agree to exchange this circulation for coin. Without the co-operation of the Union Bank, the movement within the state for the resumption of specie payments failed.[8]

Mississippians still looked to the Union Bank to save them from calamity. Under the terms of an "Act Supplementary to an Act to Incorporate the Subscribers of the Mississippi Union Bank," Governor McNutt was permitted on behalf of the state to subscribe for fifty thousand shares of stock (at $100 each), to be purchased from the proceeds of a bond sale authorized for that purpose. To sell the bonds the president and directors of the bank were to appoint three commissioners who were required to arrange for their disposal at not less than par value. Although this supplementary legislation significantly altered the original act (which had required the approval of two successive legislatures), McNutt gave it his approval and in June signed the bonds to be sold for $5 million.[9]

In the meantime the legislature had elected the directors of the Union Bank, who held their organizational meeting on February 22. Former Governor Hiram G. Runnels was chosen president and the ailing Samuel Gwin, who had relinquished his post as register of public

[7] Volney E. Howard to Quitman, January 14, 1839, Claiborne Papers, Jackson; *Mississippi House Journal* (1839), 204-06.

[8] *Financial Register,* II (August 15, 1838), 112, (December 5, 1838), 366, (December 26, 1838), 408.

[9] *Mississippi Session Laws* (1838), 33-44.

lands at Chocchuma, became cashier. The board of directors appointed James C. Wilkins, William M. Pinckard and Edward C. Wilkinson as commissioners to sell the state bonds. Although many persons expected that their subsequent mission to the East would be a fruitless one, the commissioners were able to sell the entire amount to Nicholas Biddle, who resold them to foreign investors. Biddle agreed to pay the $5 million in five installments—on November 1, 1838, and on January 1, March 1, May 1, and July 1, 1839. The state thus began paying interest on November 1 on funds that it would not fully receive until eight months later, an arrangement that was later severely criticized.[10]

Yet at the time the loan was exultingly hailed by most Mississippians. The "entire population, whig and democrat . . . were delighted with the sale. They regarded those five millions as an especial Godsend. No one murmured the least discontent. But all was joy and commendation. Wagon after wagon was seen conveying a portion of those five millions in hard dollars to the vaults of the bank." "It is now the firm belief of three-fourths of the people of this State," Volney E. Howard wrote in December, "that they have nothing to do but fold their arms and grow rich by the magical operations of this bank."[11]

Nor were many perturbed when the bank commenced operations by issuing post notes rather than beginning on a specie basis. In defense of their course the directors maintained that this policy was adopted so that the bank would have the benefit of the full $5 million, on which they were paying interest but which they would not actually receive in full until the following summer. They also argued that by redeeming their notes in specie, currency would be withdrawn from the state at a precipitate rate. On September 22, the bank began discounting on personal security by issuing post notes payable August 1, 1839.[12]

Applicants for loans hastened to Jackson by the hundreds. "Yesterday being discount day in the Mississippi Union Bank," commented the *Mississippian* in October, "our town is again full of life; the hotels are crowded, and the streets thronged. Multitudes from a mighty distance in chariots and on horseback, have come to view this wonder-working machine." The throngs continued to come to the capital; by the time the legislature convened in January, 1839, the city was so crowded that an act was passed establishing maximum tavern rates throughout the state. It was well known that the legislators' primary purpose in approving this legislation was to force a reduction in the exorbitant rates

[10] *Mississippi House Journal* (1839), 170-71; Jackson *Mississippian,* May 31, 1839; Smith, *Economic Aspects of the Second Bank of the United States,* 210.

[11] *Mississippi House Journal* (1842), 856; Jackson *Mississippian,* December 28, 1838.

[12] Jackson *Mississippian,* September 28, October 26, 1838; *Mississippi House Journal* (1839), 172.

charged by tavernkeepers in Jackson, where applicants for loans from the Union Bank continued to flock.[13]

It was not long before the Union Bank star began to wane. Like the Brandon Bank, it lent money on the security of cotton, ultimately losing approximately $15 a bale through such transactions. Yielding to the unprecedented demands for accommodations, it granted extensive loans to insolvent persons on the doubtful security of encumbered property. Soon the public lost confidence in the post notes of the institution, which by the spring of 1839 were being discounted at 25 per cent in New York, 20 per cent in New Orleans, and 18 per cent in Vicksburg. In an attempt to bolster up this issue, the bank was forced to spend a large portion of its specie funds.[14] Thus within one year after the beginning of operations the Union Bank was in a precarious financial condition. Its only hope appeared to be in the sale of additional bonds so that it might obtain its authorized capital of $15½ million.

Even before the bank had received the entire proceeds from the original sale of the bonds, it was under severe attack by Governor McNutt. In his January, 1839, message to the legislature, he criticized the manner in which the bonds had been sold and the bank's haughty refusal to be inspected by the state banking commissioners. He also vetoed a resolution that would have granted the institution discretionary post-note powers. A joint legislative committee, dominated by the Whigs, was more sympathetic towards the bank, although one member, Henry S. Foote, about ready to renew his on-again off-again allegiance to the Democratic party, issued a sharply critical minority report.[15]

Volney E. Howard, in the columns of the *Mississippian,* renewed the attack upon the Union Bank in a series of articles beginning May 31, 1839. Although his father-in-law, John S. Gooch, was one of the directors, Howard did not hesitate to pass judgment upon every phase of the bank's management: the nature of the sale of the bonds; the post-note policy; alleged attempts to influence editors through loans; the failure to establish branches; and the unwise speculation in cotton. Runnels, with whom Howard had once been associated politically, became enraged over the articles; ultimately a bloodless duel took place between the two men in July, 1840.[16]

One of the most serious charges against the bank was that its directors were accorded "gross favoritism" in the granting of loans. In 1840 it was divulged that the total indebtedness of the directors to the

[13] Jackson *Mississippian,* October 5, 1838; *Mississippi Session Laws* (1839), 66-67.

[14] *Mississippi House Journal* (1841), 21-22; "Autobiography of Wiley P. Harris," in Rowland, *Courts, Judges, and Lawyers of Mississippi,* 286; Jackson *Mississippian,* May 31, June 21, 1839.

[15] *Mississippi House Journal* (1839), 20, 28, 170-79, 209-38, 260-64.

[16] Jackson *Mississippian,* May 31-July 5, 1839, July 17, 1840.

bank, either as drawers or as endorsers, amounted to $1,046,965.17. It was also alleged that persons indebted to the directors could easily obtain loans, while other more worthy applicants were being denied accommodations. The officers also received what were regarded as princely salaries; for example, as president Runnels was paid $10,000 per annum, while the cashier received $8,000.[17]

In 1839 Mississippi experienced even more rigorous times than in the previous years. The price of cotton was higher, but only as a result of a disastrously short crop in 1838. Men like J. F. H. Claiborne, once the possessor of considerable property, found themselves utterly bankrupt. In January the former congressman, beseeching the assistance of Marshal William M. Gwin in procuring a federal appointment, wrote that "I would willingly . . . do anything for employment." "Times are very severe in Mississippi, and I fear will still be worse," Seargent S. Prentiss wrote his sister in March. "Here in the city of Vicksburg, and the county of Warren," reported the Vicksburg *Whig* in April, "the darkest days of 1837, presented but a faint picture of what is now exhibited, and from every town and county in the State we have the same melancholy prospect. The whole community is literally on the *rack,* and the best men in the country find it impossible to raise any amount of money, except at the most ruinous sacrifices." "The fact is," William M. Gwin wrote in June, "the whole country Banks & all is broke."[18]

Under such circumstances, popular resentment turned against the state's banking system, which the public regarded as the fountainhead of Mississippi's financial distress. Law suits were numerous, but juries seldom ruled in favor of such corporations that brought suit against individuals. In June circuit court Judge David O. Shattuck was almost lynched by a Benton mob because of critical remarks he had addressed to a jury that rendered a questionable judgment against a bank. In many instances sheriffs and coroners, bowing to intense public feeling, resigned as the time approached for the convening of court, so that the scheduled proceedings could not take place. As a result, more and more cases were transferred from the state to the federal courts.[19] The state banking system thus loomed as a salient consideration in the political campaign of 1839, which would choose a governor, representatives in Congress, and a new legislature.

[17] *Mississippi Senate Journal* (1840), unnumbered page inserted between pages 496 and 497; Jackson *Mississippian,* June 7, July 5, 1839.

[18] Gray, *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States to 1860,* II, 699; Claiborne to Gwin, January 14, 1839, Gwin to Claiborne, June 3, 1839, Claiborne Papers, Library of Congress; Prentiss (ed.), *Memoir of S. S. Prentiss,* II, 115; Salisbury (North Carolina) *Western Carolinian,* May 10, 1839, quoting Vicksburg *Whig.*

[19] "Autobiography of Wiley P. Harris," in Rowland, *Courts, Judges, and Lawyers of Mississippi,* 286; Jackson *Southern Sun,* June 25, 1839; *Mississippi House Journal* (1840), 15; Davis, *Recollections of Mississippi and Mississippians,* 105.

In the campaign of 1839 the Democrats were aided by the co-operation of the Nullifiers, which had been denied them in statewide elections since 1832. Despite the failure of the two groups to act together in the senatorial election of January there were indications that an alliance might yet be effected. John A. Quitman, claiming to be a "true Democrat and Nullifier," announced his opposition to a national bank and his endorsement of the independent treasury system and declared that he would not support Clay, Harrison or Webster for the presidency because of their contrary views. During the legislative session a statewide Democratic and State Rights convention was held in Jackson, with Judge Cotesworth P. Smith, an old Nullifier, presiding. The convention (which the Columbus *Democrat* said resulted from "a fortunate conjuncture of circumstances, arising out of the exhausted state of the national finances, and the disruption of the connection between the Government and moneyed corporations") passed resolutions extolling the Kentucky and Virginia Resolutions, approving the divorce of bank and state, lauding the national administration, and praising John C. Calhoun. The delegates also renominated McNutt for the governorship and designated Albert Gallatin Brown of Copiah and Jacob Thompson of Pontotoc as their candidates for Congress.[20]

The Whigs also curried favor with the Nullifiers in their convention held on January 28. Judge George Winchester, like Smith a State Rights advocate in 1833, presided and resolutions acclaiming the principles of 1798 and a national bank were adopted. But in choosing their candidates for office the Whigs completely alienated the Nullifiers. They named Edward Turner of Adams County for the governorship and selected Adam L. Bingaman of Adams and Reuben Davis, district attorney for the ninth judicial district, as congressional candidates. Bingaman and Turner were old Adams-and-Clay men who had steadfastly opposed nullification and Davis had been a Democrat until the previous year. The Democratic candidates were much more acceptable to the State Rights faction, for none of the major nominees of their convention had been active in politics during the crisis of 1833. The Whig editor of the Woodville *Republican* was sorely displeased that his party had chosen two residents of Adams County—the most unpopular county, politically, in the state—as its principal standard bearers. "Thy will be done, O stupid convention," lamented the disappointed editor.[21]

The campaign of 1839 would also determine a new slate of legislators who would elect a United States senator for the seat then held by Robert J. Walker. The incumbent, pleading ill health, professed a desire to retire but consented to stand for re-election after being urged to do so

[20] Grenada *Grenadian,* January 4, 1839; Columbus *Democrat,* February 9, 1839; Jackson *Mississippian* (tri-weekly), January 15, 1839.
[21] Woodville *Republican,* February 9, August 17, 24, 1839.

by Governor McNutt, Marshal Gwin, and other party leaders.[22] Although Walker had been a stanch opponent of nullification in 1833 and hence was not the most pleasing candidate to the State Rights faction, his labors as chairman of the Senate committee on public lands and on behalf of Texan recognition established him as the most formidable candidate his party could choose.

To challenge Walker the Whigs put forward Seargent S. Prentiss, who had declined to seek a second term in the House of Representatives. Prentiss had studied law in Walker's office only ten years earlier and subsequent political differences had never severed friendly private relations between the two men; hence the campaign lacked the personal bitterness that characterized Walker's previous senatorial canvass. Prentiss stumped the state, while Walker, physically unable to campaign vigorously, flooded the Democratic presses with political letters described by his opponent as "long as the Mediterranean."[23]

In the campaign the Democratic party successfully exploited the public antipathy towards the banks of Mississippi. As most of the directors of such institutions were members of the opposition party, the Democrats denounced the Whigs as the "Shin-Plaster Party" and as the authors of banking legislation in Mississippi. The keynote of the Democratic campaign was sounded on June 24 by Senator Walker, who announced on that date that he would be a candidate for a second term.[24]

When Walker had entered the Senate three years earlier he had been no advocate of hard-money policies. In 1836 he had vigorously defended the administration's pet banking system and in 1837 he led the unsuccessful campaign to revoke the unpopular Specie Circular. The Natchez *Courier,* a dyed-in-the-wool Whig press, heaped lavish praise upon him for his celebrated dispute with Benton on the latter issue. On that occasion the Mississippian had emphatically declined to "enlist as a recruit" in the "new crusade against the banks of his own, and every other State in the Union."[25]

Hard times had produced a startling transformation in Walker's economic views. He now ascribed the nation's economic ills to the over-issue of paper money and announced his opposition to the "whole wretched banking system."[26] He actively supported the independent treasury proposal and was willing to inject Locofocoism as the principal issue in his campaign for re-election to the Senate.

[22] *Niles' Register,* LVI (August 24, 1839), 412-15.

[23] Prentiss to T. J. Cathings and others, August 10, 1839, in Macon *Intelligencer,* September 5, 1839; Prentiss (ed.), *Memoir of S. S. Prentiss,* II, 146.

[24] Jackson *Mississippian,* May 24, July 19, 1839; *Niles' Register,* LVI (August 24, 1839), 412-15.

[25] *Cong. Globe,* 24 Cong., 1 Sess., 240, 285; *ibid.,* 24 Cong., 2 Sess., 217; Walker to Levi Woodbury, March 8, 1836, Jackson Papers; Natchez *Courier and Journal,* July 7, 1837.

[26] *Cong. Globe,* 25 Cong., 2 Sess., 32, 125.

In his letter of June 24 Walker denounced all banks, state and national, declaring that "the very foundation" of such institutions was "based upon fraud and fiction." This was true, he said, because the directors relied upon "the gambler's calculation of chances, immoral as that would be, that the notes would not be presented for payment beyond the ability of the bank to redeem them." "Most truly," he declared, "may we point to the banks as the great cause of all our calamities." In addition, they were "dangerous to public liberty." As an immediate measure he proposed the withdrawal from circulation of all bank paper not payable upon demand in specie, and as a long-range program he advocated the abolition of all bank notes of a smaller denomination than $20.[27]

During the campaign the Woodville *Republican,* an anti-Democratic press, warned the Whigs "against identifying their principles with our present wretchedly mismanaged banking institutions." Edward Turner, the party's gubernatorial candidate, conceded that the banking capital of the state had been extended "beyond all just and sustainable bounds" and recommended that all such institutions that could not comply with their charters should surrender them and that the remaining banks should be compelled to pay specie or wind up their affairs. With validity equal that of their opponents, the Whigs charged that the Democrats were responsible for the creation of the Mississippi banks, for that party had held a majority in the legislatures of 1836 and 1837 when most of them had been chartered.[28] In truth, neither party was solely responsible for their creation and neither was guiltless, but the Democrats were more successful than their opponents in capitalizing upon the popular hostility to the Mississippi banks.

During the campaign Prentiss and the other Whig candidates supported the movement for a new national bank, which the Democratic standard bearers vigorously opposed. Despite the deleterious effects of the panic of 1837, the movement for a revival of that institution had made little headway in Mississippi, where resolutions to endorse it had failed in previous legislatures. In 1837 John A. Grimball had campaigned for governor on that issue and had finished a poor third. The following year one editor had written that "the party in favor of Clay

[27] *Niles' Register,* LVI (August 24, 1839), 412-15.

[28] Woodville *Republican,* October 3, 1839; Macon *Intelligencer,* August 29, October 3, 1839. Not only were the state banks objects of hatred but they also became subjects of ridicule as a result of a celebrated hoax by Joseph Seawell Jones of Shocco, North Carolina, who posed as a United States Treasury agent and as an emissary of a North Carolina bank during his peregrinations through Mississippi in the summer of 1839. See Edwin A. Miles, "Joseph Seawell Jones of Shocco—Historian and Humbug," *North Carolina Historical Review,* XXXIV (October, 1957), 501-04, and Edwin A. Miles (ed.), "Francis Leech's 'The Mammoth Humbug, or the Adventures of Shocco Jones in Mississippi, in the Summer of 1839,'" *Journal of Mississippi History,* XXI (January, 1959), 1-39.

and a National Bank in this State could hardly elect a hog reeve." Prentiss' well-known friendship with Clay was indeed a liability to his candidacy. During the latter part of the campaign Walker issued one of his most persuasive letters, pointing out this relationship and implying that Prentiss favored the Kentuckian's American System, which was unpopular in Mississippi.[29]

The November election of 1839 resulted in a Democratic sweep. In the gubernatorial election McNutt defeated Turner by a vote of 18,823 to 15,709, while Brown and Thompson were elected to Congress by similar margins. The Democratic majority in the legislature was so overwhelming that Walker received more than twice as many votes as Prentiss in the balloting for United States senator in January, 1840. Despite the continuing hard times, a factor that usually handicaps the party in power, the Democrats won an easy victory.[30]

To a great extent the Democratic triumph was due to the party's skillful exploitation of the public animosity against the state's banks. In the campaign the party leaders embraced the program of Locofocoism; indeed their opponents charged that the Mississippi Locofocos carried their "levelling theories" further than their compatriots in New York. The Mississippi Democracy, however, did not support hard-money principles for the same reasons as did the eastern Locofocos. Only after it became evident that an attempted expansion of the collapsing credit system would only retard the state's economic recovery did the Mississippians become convinced that a hard-money, anti-bank program held out brighter hope. With the price of cotton pegged to the world price, they reasoned that it was ill-advised for them to pay for their products in a medium of exchange that was depreciating steadily. "A sound currency," said Governor McNutt in 1839, "would do more to relieve the embarrassments of the country than any measure which can be adopted. It would soon bring down the price of produce, and the cost of growing cotton, to the old standard, and the planters of the country would save, annually, fully three millions of dollars."[31] The anti-bank campaign also appealed to many Mississippians who were heavily indebted to the banks and did not wish to see their corporate creditors strong enough to enforce the repayment of their obligations.

The repercussions of the anti-bank crusade were manifold. The doom of the Union Bank, already imperiled by the maladministration of the directors, was firmly sealed. In the summer of 1839 Runnels was

[29] *Mississippi House Journal* (1838), 197-206; Holly Springs *Marshall County Republican and Free Trade Advocate,* August 11, 1838. "Robert J. Walker to the People of Mississippi," September 28, 1839, in Jackson *Mississippian,* October 11, 1839; Macon *Intelligencer,* December 5, 1839.

[30] Woodville *Republican,* November 30, 1839; *Mississippi Senate Journal* (1840), 68-69.

[31] Rodney *Telegraph,* May 18, 1839; *Mississippi House Journal* (1839), 462. See also *Financial Register,* II (October 24, 1838), 268.

unable to sell an additional $5 million bond issue that had been authorized. After his re-election, Governor McNutt intensified his attacks upon the institution, accusing the directorate of "culpable mismanagement and selfish favoritism." The governor declared that he would not execute any additional bonds and recommended the liquidation of the bank. A committee of the legislature submitted a report sharply critical of the bank. In accordance with an act of that body, McNutt declared its charter forfeited in July, 1840. Runnels, incensed by this action, caned McNutt on the streets of Jackson, but he did not retard the Democratic governor's assaults upon the bank.[32]

In his message to the legislature of 1841 McNutt advocated the repudiation of the Union Bank bonds on the grounds of fraud. Although he had signed both the original and supplementary bank charters and had sanctioned the disposal of the bonds, he now declared that their sale had been illegal for the following reasons: there had been a fundamental change in the bank's charter without the approval of two successive legislatures, a violation of the ninth section of the 1832 constitution; the bonds had been purchased at less than par value, in contravention of the charter of 1838; and the Bank of the United States of Pennsylvania did not have legal authority to purchase the bonds. McNutt's most eloquent argument was that the state would have to raise $1,500,722.22 during that session of the legislature to meet all its obligations. "Such an enormous tax can never be collected from the hard earnings of the people of this State," he said. "They will not elect representatives who will impose it, or tax gatherers who will collect it."[33]

Although the legislature of 1841 differed with the governor and approved a resolution requiring that the bonds be paid so that the credit of the state might be preserved, McNutt's veto of the resolution injected the issue of repudiation into the gubernatorial campaign of 1841. Tilghman M. Tucker, the Democratic anti-bond candidate—who as a state senator in 1838 had protested the passage of the Union Bank charter—was victorious over Judge David O. Shattuck, supported by a coalition of Whigs and bond-paying Democrats. In 1842 the legislature passed a resolution prohibiting the repayment of the Union Bank bonds.[34]

While insisting that the Union Bank bonds were fraudulent, the legislature of 1842 upheld the validity of the Planters' Bank bonds negotiated in 1831 for $2 million. Nevertheless, after the principal on these bonds became due, the electorate refused in 1852 to impose a special tax to provide for their retirement. The repudiation of the Union and Planters' Bank bonds dangerously impaired the state's credit throughout

[32] Vicksburg *Sentinel*, March 4, 1840; *Mississippi House Journal* (1840), 34-36, 544-62; *ibid.* (1841), 84; Jackson *Mississippian*, July 17, 1840.

[33] *Mississippi House Journal* (1841), 23-26.

[34] *Ibid.*, 491-504; Rowland, *Mississippi*, I, 624; *Mississippi Session Laws* (1842), 260-62.

the nineteenth century. Although Mississippi was not the only state that refused to honor such obligations, Union propagandists during the Civil War—and particularly Robert J. Walker—raised the cry of "Mississippi Repudiation" to thwart Confederate attempts to secure foreign loans.[35]

In 1840 Governor McNutt urged that the charters of all state banks be repealed because of their failure to pay specie. Bills to that effect were introduced in both houses of the legislature, but the state lawmakers approved a less drastic measure, requiring banks to pay specie, to limit their bills of exchange to three times the amount of coin in their vaults, and to cease operations in post notes and in cotton. For their failure to comply with the provisions of this act, McNutt subsequently declared that nine banks had forfeited their charters, although several institutions declined to recognize his authority to issue such a proclamation. In 1843 the legislature passed the Briscoe Bill, or the Quo Warranto Act, which established a mode of judicial procedure to terminate the existence of such banks. Under the terms of this statute many debtors were enabled to discharge their obligations to the banks at a small fraction of their original liability.[36]

By the middle eighteen-forties all banks had ceased operations in the state; in fact, resentment against such institutions was so intense that no further banks were chartered in ante bellum Mississippi. A constitutional amendment to deny the legislature the power to charter such institutions was presented to the electorate in 1847, but it did not receive an absolute majority of those voting in the general election of that year and thus failed of adoption. Thereafter until the Civil War Mississippians generally relied for their paper currency upon bank notes issued by institutions chartered by other states, while commission merchants and brokers performed many of the services earlier rendered by the banks.[37]

Of equal significance for the future was the so-called "Union" of the Democratic and State Rights party that had contributed to the victory of 1839. It was not a complete union, however, for many of the original Nullifiers had already been absorbed into the ranks of the Whigs and many more refused to enlist in the anti-bank crusade that led to repudiation. The "Bargain of 1839" resulted in a victory for state rights

[35] Josiah A. P. Campbell, "Planter's and Union Bank Bonds," *Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society,* IV (1901), 493-97; Robert J. Walker, "Jefferson Davis, Repudiation, Recognition and Slavery," in *American Slavery and Finances* (London, 1864), *passim.*

[36] *Mississippi House Journal* (1840), 37, 49; *ibid.* (1841), 20; *Mississippi Senate Journal* (1840), 57-58; *Mississippi Session Laws* (1840), 13-24; *ibid.* (1843), 52-57; Horace S. Fulkerson, *Random Recollections of Early Days in Mississippi* (Vicksburg, 1885), 101.

[37] *Mississippi Session Laws* (1846), 203-05; *Mississippi House Journal* (1848), 28; Brough, "The History of Banking in Mississippi," 340.

principles: in exchange for the support of the Nullifiers for hard-money principles, particularly for the independent treasury system, the Democratic party endorsed principles it had fought in 1833. In less than ten years after the nullification crisis, the Mississippi legislature, which had overwhelmingly sustained Jackson in 1833, approved a vigorous resolution endorsing the tenets of the Kentucky and Virginia Resolutions.[38]

The Democratic about-face was in a large measure attributable to the growing southern anxiety on the question of slavery. No longer could the Whigs accuse the Jacksonians, as they had done in 1835 and 1836, of indifference to the dangers ensuing from the abolition movement. Although as individuals the Whigs possessed more extensive slaveholdings than their opponents, the Democratic party conducted the more spirited defense of the South's peculiar institution. The more conservative Whigs preferred to keep the issue out of politics as much as possible, while the Democrats became the outspoken champions of slavocracy. The Whig strength lay in the older settled regions of the state—in the counties adjoining the Mississippi and upper Pearl Rivers —where the plantation system had already developed extensively. The Democratic strength lay in the Choctaw and Chickasaw counties in north and central Mississippi, still for the most part frontier territory. Yet the frontier spokesmen confidently expected that the institution of slavery would some day assist in transforming that area into an even more productive region than the older parts of the state.[39]

The "Union" of the Nullifiers and Locofocos assured state Democratic supremacy—with minor exceptions—for the remainder of the ante bellum period. After 1840, more important than the Democratic-Whig struggle in Mississippi was the internal rivalry within the Democratic party. Prior to their departure from the state during the eighteen-forties, Robert J. Walker and William M. Gwin dominated one faction, while Albert Gallatin Brown, elected governor in 1843, and Representative Jacob Thompson led another. During the same decade, Jefferson Davis, who played no part in the political struggles of the eighteen-thirties, and John A. Quitman joined Brown and Thompson as leaders of the radical state rights wing of the Democratic party. The opposition of this dominant group to the Compromise of 1850 caused Henry S. Foote, elected to the United States Senate in 1847, to make his final break with the Mississippi Democracy. Although Foote defeated Davis for the governorship in 1851, the former left the state shortly thereafter and the radical clique of the Democratic party controlled state politics

[38] *Mississippi Session Laws* (1842), 242-49.

[39] Charles Sackett Sydnor, *Slavery in Mississippi* (New York, 1933), 247-48. In the gubernatorial campaign of 1839 Turner, the Whig candidate, carried only one county in which the white population predominated, while McNutt was triumphant in only four counties where there were more slaves than whites.

for the remainder of the ante bellum period—during which time Mississippi became a "Storm Center of Secession."[40]

Such developments, of course, could not be foreseen by the Mississippians of 1839. The Democratic party had won a sweeping victory in the state elections of that autumn and faced the presidential election year of 1840 with an optimism that proved unwarranted. If the hard times continued, the national administration, headed by a President who had never been popular in the state, would suffer at the polls. Against Henry Clay, who was also held in low esteem by Mississippians, Van Buren might have carried Mississippi. But in December, 1839, the Whigs, meeting in convention at Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, chose General William Henry Harrison as their standard bearer. In Mississippi —as in the nation—hard times and hard cider proved to be an effective combination for the Whigs in 1840.

[40] James E. Winston, "The Lost Commission: A Study in Mississippi History," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review,* V (September, 1918), 158-89; Percy Lee Rainwater, *Mississippi, Storm Center of Secession, 1856-1861* (Baton Rouge, 1938).

CHAPTER XII

A LAST LOOK

"He [Andrew Jackson] was ever the fast and unchanging friend of Mississippi. Firm and inflexible in his purpose, wise in council and terrible in war; he possessed a mind to comprehend and will to serve our wants—his was a heart without guile, and in his bosom the fires of patriotism never went out . . . . He has descended to the tomb, but it is left with us to manifest our respect and veneration for his name."

Governor Albert Gallatin Brown[1]

January 8, 1840, marked the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Battle of New Orleans. Since it fell at the beginning of an election year, Democratic leaders throughout the nation reasoned that the presence of the Old Hero at the site of his victory on that date would aid the cause of his presidential successor, Martin Van Buren, in his campaign for re-election. They recalled that the general's last visit there, in 1828, had dramatized his own successful campaign for the presidency.

When plans were announced for the New Orleans celebration, Mississippians determined to invite Old Hickory to visit their state upon his return from the Louisiana city. On November 28, 1839, in a meeting in the Capitol, a bi-partisan group issued a formal invitation to the former President. A committee of the state's leading citizens, including Whigs as well as Democrats, was chosen to make arrangements for the reception. Marshal William M. Gwin urged his old friend to accept. "I have never seen such enthusiasm as was exhibited at the meeting called for the purpose of inviting you to visit us," he wrote, predicting that "your reception here will be the most enthusiastic that ever has been known in America." Jackson, poor and ill, was finally persuaded to make the southern journey—a decision made primarily in the hope of borrowing money from old friends in Louisiana and Mississippi to relieve the heavy financial obligations of his adopted son, Andrew Jackson, Jr.[2]

Already near exhaustion from the effects of the New Orleans reception, the aging Jackson arrived at Natchez on January 15. During his four-day visit in Mississippi he shook countless hands and attended

[1] *Mississippi House Journal* (1846), 39.

[2] Jackson *Mississippian*, November 29, 1839; Gwin to Jackson, November 30, 1839, Jackson Papers; Marquis James, *Andrew Jackson, Portrait of a President* (Indianapolis, 1937), 447.

banquets, public meetings, and balls held in his honor—activities that taxed still further his feeble strength. At Natchez he was welcomed by a speech from Adam L. Bingaman, Adams County's most prominent Whig, and later attended a banquet, at which many veterans of the Louisiana campaign were present.[3]

Before he left Natchez the Old Hero suffered a hemorrhage of the lungs and was bleeding profusely when he arrived at Vicksburg the following afternoon. Proceeding immediately to the residence of Marshal Gwin, he ordered the latter's physician to extract a quart of blood from his left arm. "We were all startled," Gwin wrote later, "but no one dared to speak. When it was over he asked for certain food and then to be left entirely alone in bed for two hours." The general's orders were strictly obeyed. "He then rose dressed & himself rec[eive]d the state delegation inviting him to the capital as guest of the State—the city delegation and shook hands with thousands put his hands on the heads of numerous children and blessed them and then retired."[4]

On Friday, January 17, Jackson and his entourage journeyed to Jackson, traveling part of the way on the newly constructed Vicksburg-to-Jackson railroad, now complete except for the final fifteen miles. In the capital "carriage upon carriage, filled with our fair country women, rolled into the city—sulkies, buggies, and phaetons dashed through the streets—cavalcade after cavalcade of sturdy yeomanry from distant parts gallopped [*sic*] in—the slaves had holiday, and came in laughing crowds—and even the scattered Choctaws, with clean shirts and new moccasins, called up their ponies and rode in to see the man who whipped their brethren in a dozen battles."

At 4:00 P.M. "ringing bells, loud music and roaring cannon," accompanied by the "joyous hurrahs of assembled thousands," hailed the arrival of the former President to the city named in his honor. After Governor McNutt had extended an official welcome to the Old Hero, Jackson retired to his quarters in the Eagle Hotel. That evening the local theatre was converted into a "splendid saloon," where a ball was held in honor of the distinguished visitor. "At nine o'clock General Jackson visited the ball—on his entrance every hand clapped, [and] the band struck up 'Hail to the Chief.'" As the general and his suite made their way through the throng, he bowed "here and there to the ladies, who saluted him with bright eyes and kind looks."

On Saturday the Old Hero was honored at a public gathering in front of the Capitol, where Jesse Speight, speaker of the state House of Representatives, made the principal address. By this time Jackson's physical powers were so depleted that his nephew, Andrew Jackson

[3] Natchez *Free Trader,* January 16, 1840.

[4] Gwin to J. F. H. Claiborne, February 22, 1879, Claiborne Papers, Chapel Hill; Natchez *Free Trader,* January 20, 1840.

Donelson, read his written reply to the hushed assembly. In the evening a "most magnificent levee" at the governor's mansion ended the week's festivities in honor of the former President, who doubtlessly welcomed the advent of the Sabbath with more than ordinary thanksgiving.[5]

On January 20 Jackson departed from Vicksburg on his return trip to the Hermitage, leaving Mississippi soil for the last time. His hosts in that state had expressed their friendship by other means than their hospitality. From Marshal Gwin and former Governor Hiram G. Runnels he was able to obtain loans in excess of $15,000 for Andrew Jackson, Jr. Old Hickory acted as surety for his son.[6]

The Mississippi that Jackson visited in 1840 had changed considerably since his previous visit in 1828. The most obvious difference was the rapid physical development during the intervening twelve years: the area of settlement had more than doubled, while the population had almost tripled.

This growth was not without major political impact. The piney woods, which had held the balance of power in 1830, had lost its pivotal role in state politics. The Democratic strength now lay in those counties created from the Choctaw and Chickasaw cessions of Jackson's first administration. Here, in central and northern Mississippi, the most phenomenal expansion had taken place, for in 1840 over one half of the population resided in a region that had been occupied by Indians only a decade earlier. The old counties—whose white population had increased by only a few thousand during the same period—had surrendered their political power grudgingly. In 1835 the Senate refused to meet with the House because the Choctaw counties were represented and in 1837 a faction led by Seargent S. Prentiss attempted to break up another session because the Chickasaw representatives were seated. Such an attitude tended to strengthen the hostility of the new settlers towards the older counties and the Democratic party skillfully exploited this animosity.

Another change that was apparent by 1840 was the rapid extension of the plantation system into newer areas of the state. During the previous decade the slave population increased at a much swifter rate than the white. The Yazoo and upper Pearl River regions were now plantation territory, while the Mississippi Delta was being opened up to the same influence. These areas, like the river counties of the old Natchez District, became strongholds of the Whig party.

With the rapid expansion of slavery, the attitude of Mississippians towards the "peculiar institution" also changed. Slavery was no longer

[5] For Old Hickory's visit to Jackson see Jackson *Mississippian*, January 24, 1840, Columbus *Democrat*, January 25, 1840, and Natchez *Daily Courier*, January 24, 1840.

[6] Two papers dated January 20, 1840; Hiram G. Runnels to Andrew Jackson, Jr., January 22, 1840, Jackson Papers.

regarded as a necessary evil, but rather as a positive good. In the early eighteen-thirties Franklin E. Plummer had spoken for the small farmers of Mississippi, but during the latter part of the decade the Democratic spokesmen represented men who regarded themselves as potential planters. The plantation had become the Mississippian's ideal.

Other significant political changes occurred during the decade. In a society composed mainly of recent immigrants, there was less regard for social distinctions than existed in older communities. The new constitution of 1832 abolished property qualifications for office and suffrage and provided for the popular election of most state officials, including judges. Greater participation in government was also achieved on the local level. The old county courts, whose members had been appointed by the General Assembly, were supplanted by popularly elected boards of police.[7]

In accord with these constitutional and legislative changes, political practices were also altered. The convention system, although severely attacked during the campaigns of 1835 and 1836, had triumphed by 1839. Although defective, it provided for greater popular participation in the selection of political candidates. With the growing importance of an electorate many of whom were ignorant and uneducated, political campaigns to appeal to their tastes and prejudices were now conducted. The political rally came to rival the militia muster and "court day" as a gala social occasion.

Public instruction of officials on all levels of government became a common practice during the period. (One candidate for the constitutional convention of 1832 contended that every public officer "should at all times be open to receive any kind of instruction from the people and act agreeably to *their* wishes.") The election of a United States senator had become the concern of the entire people and not merely a function of the state legislators. Legislative candidates were often "constrained to hazard the success of the canvass" upon this single question unless they pledged themselves to vote for the senatorial candidate approved by a majority of their constituents. An attempt by the legislature of 1833 to force the resignation of Senator George Poindexter failed, but in 1840 that body censured Senator John Henderson for his opposition to the independent treasury system and instructed him to vote for that measure. Henderson declined to obey these instructions; and after the presidential election of 1840 he defended his course by pointing out that Harrison's victory in Mississippi had justified his stand.[8]

[7] *Mississippi Session Laws,* 16 Sess. (January, 1833), 5-23.

[8] Vicksburg *Advocate and Register,* July 5, 1832; Natchez *Free Trader,* September 22, 1835; *Mississippi Senate Journal,* 16 Sess. (January, 1833), 27, 192; *Mississippi Session Laws* (1840), 90-91, 263-65; *Letter of John Henderson to the Legislature of the State of Mississippi, December 28, 1840* (Washington, 1840).

The eighteen-thirties witnessed the development of first a three-party and then a two-party system in Mississippi. But party lines in the state were never rigid. The volatile Henry S. Foote—"General Weathercock," according to his detractors—was a Democrat in 1834, a Whig in 1835, a Democrat in 1836, a Whig in 1837, and a Democrat in 1840! There was never more than a loose coalition between the National wing of the Whig party and the Nullifiers. By 1840 many of the leaders of the latter faction who had not compromised their state rights views in the national bank controversy had returned to the Democratic party.[9]

The Jacksonian era produced a new species of politician, of which Samuel Gwin was the Mississippi prototype. The guiding spirit of the state "Regency," he mastered the art of "*manufacturing* public opinion" and strove indefatigably to mold the Democratic party into an effective political organization. He made arrangements to hold public meetings and conventions; he wrote letters and dispatched couriers to insure that they were well attended; he supervised the printing and distribution of presidential messages, handbills, and ballots; and he rallied the "sovereigns" to exercise their franchise on election day. The party leader worked closely with such able propagandists as Anthony Campbell and Doctor Samuel A. Cartwright who contributed anonymous pieces to the Democratic presses. J. F. H. Claiborne regarded Campbell as "perhaps the best writer in the Jackson ranks." According to Senator John Black, Doctor Cartwright appeared "to deal *pro re nata* in pills or politics, and to write a dissertation on Cayenne Pepper or Democracy, with equal facility." In recognition of the more important political role of newspapers, leading Democratic editors were rewarded with state or federal offices.[10]

A spirit of reform, although curbed regarding the institution of slavery, had been prevalent during the decade. The Mississippi Temperance Society was organized in 1830; four years later eleven local societies sent delegates to its statewide convention held in Jackson. The advocates of temperance gained sufficient strength to secure the passage in 1839 of "An Act for the Suppression of Tippling-Houses, and to Discourage and Prevent the Odious Vice of Drunkenness," which prohibited the sale of liquor in quantities of less than a gallon. But the "Gallon Law" was not a popular measure: Henry S. Foote, its principal author, was hanged in effigy from a majestic oak near the new Capitol; editors denounced it as an "outrageous infraction of personal liberty";

[9] For Henry S. Foote's vacillations see Natchez *Free Trader*, August 5, September 5, 1837 and Jackson *Mississippian*, September 29, 1837.

[10] Washington *National Intelligencer*, August 23, 1834, quoting Natchez *Courier and Journal;* Hamilton and Nuermberger, "Claiborne's Memoranda," 140; John Black to C. C. Mayson, n. d., quoted in Vicksburg *Register*, April 23, 1835; Miles, "Mississippi Press in the Jackson Era," 17-18.

tavernkeepers draped the doors of their establishments in black; and the law was openly flouted until its repeal in 1842. Movements for the suppression of two other widely criticized practices of that era, dueling and gambling, were organized but likewise met with little success.[11]

The old barbaric penal code, which sanctioned various forms of corporal punishment as well as capital punishment for such crimes as forgery, robbery, and burglary, was finally replaced in 1839 by a more humane code. This revision had been made possible by the establishment of the state penitentiary, authorized in 1836 and opened four years later. During Governor McNutt's administration legislation granting property rights to women and abolishing imprisonment for debt was adopted. These measures were partially attributable to the economic distresses of that era, and the "Woman's Law," in particular, was denounced as one of many *"desperate & ingenious expedients* for holding property and avoiding debts." "It is notorious," one Mississippian wrote later, "that no act ever passed has been a cover to more or ranker injustice than this."[12]

Other movements for social reform met with greater success in the eighteen-forties. For two decades successive governors had stressed the importance of state encouragement of education, but it was not until 1844 that the legislature chartered the University of Mississippi, which opened at Oxford in 1846. In that latter year legislation providing for a statewide system of common schools was also passed. In 1848 the legislature authorized the establishment of a lunatic asylum and a school for the blind.[13]

In 1840, when Jackson visited Mississippi for the last time, the state was reaping the sorrowful harvest of a boom-and-bust economy. The Old Hero's war against the Bank of the United States had occurred at a time when there was an insatiable demand for banking facilities in the state, and although Mississippians had generally supported him in his struggle with the "Monster," they did not do so because of any attachment to hard-money principles. The reckless course of the Planters' and Agricultural Banks, the state's deposit banks, contributed to the dizzy spiral of inflation that culminated in the panic of 1837. Jackson's

[11] Natchez *Southern Galaxy,* April 22, 1830; Jackson *Mississippian* January 24, 1834; *Mississippi Session Laws* (1839), 26-30; *ibid.* (1842), 108-14; Natchez *Free Trader,* February 14, 16, April 13, 1839; Foote, *Casket of Reminiscences,* 271. For ineffective legislation regarding gambling and dueling see *Mississippi Session Laws* (May, 1837), 288-92; *ibid.* (1839), 35-39.

[12] *Mississippi Session Laws* (1839), 67-72, 72-73, 102-94; E. Bruce Thompson, "Reforms in the Penal Code of Mississippi, 1820-1850," *Journal of Mississippi History,* VII (April, 1945), 51-74; Thomas Harney to John A. Quitman, February 6, 1840, Claiborne Papers, Jackson; Jennings, *Nine Years of Democratic Rule in Mississippi,* 122.

[13] *Mississippi Session Laws* (1844), 227-28; *ibid.* (1846), 98-104; *ibid.* (1848), 153-55, 177-79; William Henington Weathersby, *A History of Educational Legislation in Mississippi from 1798 to 1860* (Chicago, 1921), *passim.*

attempt to check the wild speculation in public lands met with little favor in Mississippi, where the Specie Circular was frigidly received.

It was not until 1839, when the economic depression was entering its third year, that the Mississippi Democracy reversed itself to champion the hard-money program of Locofocoism. Jackson's war against the Bank of the United States served as a precedent for their war against their own financial institutions and they joined the anti-bank crusade with the uninhibited zeal of new converts. The crusade, which led to repudiation and a complete disruption of the state's economy, reflected little glory upon its leaders, particularly Governor McNutt.

It was inevitable that the desperate economic situation of the state would play a significant role in the presidential campaign of 1840. "The times seem so hard," Martin W. Philips of Hinds County wrote in March, "that no one could think would be worse; the ablest men in the land cannot raise money." "The pecuniary condition of our State is such," Joseph W. Haskins of Columbus wrote three days later, "that a man *in need* can scarcely borrow ten dollars from his best friend; and secondly if he labours either mentally or corporeally [*sic*] he has to wait, like the poor mariner, for both wind and tide, before he can get the rewards of his labours." "We have hard times in No[rth] Ca[rolina]," wrote one visitor from that state in April, "hard times in the east, hard times everywhere, but Miss[issippi] exceeds them all." Only the passage of a series of laws to delay or make difficult the forced sale of property saved many Mississippians from losing all of their possessions.[14]

Hard times seriously impaired Democratic chances in Mississippi, as indeed throughout the nation. Although administration supporters hailed the signing of the Independent Treasury Act on July 4 as a second Declaration of Independence, that measure failed to promise any immediate improvement in the economy. It would have taken a more popular candidate than Van Buren to carry Mississippi in 1840 and the Democrats could not convince the electorate that Jackson was running for a fourth term.

On the other hand, the Whig campaign of 1840 appealed to most Mississippians. The party leaders, declining to wage their battle on political issues, skillfully exploited the new campaign tactics of the era against their Democratic opponents. For their presidential candidate they chose a military hero of their own, General William Henry Harrison, the victor of Tippecanoe. As elsewhere in the Union, "log cabins

[14] Franklin L. Riley (ed.), "Diary of a Mississippi Planter," *Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society,* X (1900), 317-18; Haskins to David L. Swain, March 28, 1840, Swain Manuscripts, North Carolina Department of Archives and History, Raleigh; William H. Wills, "A Southern Traveler's Diary in 1840," *Publications of the Southern Historical Association,* VIII (1904), 35; *Mississippi Session Laws* (1840), 25-30; *ibid.* (1841), 113-15; *ibid.* (1842), 127-30.

were built, hard cider was drunk, [and] Tippecanoe songs were sung." The incumbent President was depicted as an aristocrat with no regard for the sufferings of the people:

> In the 'White House' Van Buren may drink his Champagne
> And have himself toasted from Georgia to Maine,
> But we in Log Cabins, with hearts warm and true,
> Drink a Gourd of Hard Cider t'old Tippecanoe.

As the campaign neared its end Democratic Representative Albert Gallatin Brown was willing to concede privately that "we are the worst-beat party that ever run a race." Harrison carried the state by a vote of 19,530 to 16,993.[15]

It was not until Jackson's last years that Mississippi began to recover from the prolonged depression that had begun in 1837. During 1842 and 1843 "prices of every description of property fell to the lowest point, perhaps ever known in the history of our country," but afterwards the economy improved steadily. Gradually during the eighteen-forties the state was able to redeem the treasury warrants that it had been forced to issue during the hard times. On January 1, 1844, this indebtedness amounted to $614,743.83½, but within two years the sum had been reduced to $271,707.97. In 1848 warrants for only $37,036.81 remained unpaid. The state's financial burden, of course, had been eased considerably by the repudiation of the Union Bank bonds.[16]

Andrew Jackson's death, which occurred on June 8, 1845, was mourned throughout Mississippi. When news of his passing reached Jackson, the High Court of Errors and Appeals and other courts then in session immediately adjourned. In that city, as well as in Vicksburg, Natchez, Holly Springs, Columbus, Oxford, and other localities, public meetings attended by Whigs and Democrats alike were held in his honor. In Natchez, Mississippi's Whig citadel, "party spirit was forgotten and party differences were thrown aside, and all joined in paying tribute to the memory of the dead to which his patriotism and his distinguished services to his country entitled him." The surviving veterans of the Natchez Rifle Corps and the Mississippi Dragoons were among those who gathered to hear Doctor Samuel A. Cartwright deliver a eulogy on the Old Hero.[17]

[15] Columbus *Democrat,* November 14, 1840; Natchez *Daily Courier,* June 2, 1840; Brown to J. F. H. Claiborne, June 10, 1879, Claiborne Papers, Chapel Hill; Port Gibson *Correspondent,* November 27, 1840.

[16] *Mississippi Session Laws* (1841), 74-79; *Mississippi House Journal* (1844), 11; *ibid.* (1846), 12-13; *ibid.* (1848), 17.

[17] Jackson *Mississippian,* June 18, 1845; Jackson *Southern Weekly Reformer,* July 19, 1845; Holly Springs *Gazette,* June 28, 1845; Natchez *Free Trader,* July 15, 1845; Benjamin M. Dusenbery (comp.), *Monument to the Memory of General Andrew Jackson: Containing Twenty-five Eulogies and Sermons Delivered on Occasion of His Death* (Philadelphia, 1846), 299.

Thus Mississippians paid tribute to Jackson in death as they had in life. They honored him—as they had done in 1828—as the military hero who had defeated the Indians at Horseshoe Bend and the British at New Orleans and as the statesman who had helped remove the Indians from a portion of their soil. But they also paid homage to him as the President during whose administration their state had experienced its most spectacular growth. Mississippians, Representative Franklin E. Plummer had said in 1832, regarded Jackson as "the man to whom that State owes her prosperity."[18] Whatever the causes of the economic depression that followed his retirement from the White House, they did not blame Old Hickory.

For thirty years prior to his death Jackson exerted as much personal influence in Mississippi as in any other state. In each of his three presidential campaigns he carried every county; and no opponent entered the lists against him in 1832. During his presidency few candidates who declined to "Huzza for Jackson" were elected to major offices in the state. "The fiat of General Jackson," J. F. H. Claiborne later said, "was both law and gospel to the people of Missi[ssippi]." In 1836 his prestige carried that state—but not Tennessee—for Martin Van Buren. Even after his retirement to the Hermitage, his name continued to wield considerable political magnetism in Mississippi, where his letters in support of "Young Hickory"—James K. Polk—contributed materially to the successful Democratic campaign of 1844.[19]

Who were the Jacksonian Democrats in Mississippi? It would be fallacious to search for economic motives that might have prompted them to support particular measures endorsed by his national administration: they championed the Old Hero more often in spite of his policies rather than because of them. While his Indian removal program met with almost universal approval in the state, there were many Mississippians of his own party who did not share his attitude toward such issues as the tariff, internal improvements, banking, and currency. The state Jacksonian leaders were essentially practical politicians who had hitched their wagon to Old Hickory's star and realized that their personal advancement depended upon their unequivocal support of him in all controversies. "I found myself a democrat without being able to explain why I was of that party," Wiley P. Harris wrote in his autobiography. "I began . . . as a follower of Jackson knowing nothing of the Force bill, regarding 'nullification' as a heresy without knowing what it meant." Perhaps Robert J. Walker did not confide, as reported, to a group of fellow Democrats that "had Gen. Jackson recommended the recharter

[18] *Register of Debates*, 22 Cong., 1 Sess., 2712.

[19] "Sketch of Franklin E. Plummer," Claiborne Papers, Chapel Hill; James Elliott Walmsley, "The Presidential Campaign of 1844 in Mississippi," *Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society*, IX (1906), 189-90.

of the Bank, *we should all have been good Bank men*"; nevertheless such a statement was in accord with his own political career prior to 1834.[20]

In the controversies that arose during the Jackson administration the Mississippi Regency devised a formula for political success that it almost invariably followed. If the greatest opposition to a particular policy came from the river counties (as it usually did), Samuel Gwin and company capitalized upon the animosity toward that region among the small farmers in other sections of the state. "In our little villages they are opposed generally to the President's course," Buckner Harris wrote on one occasion, "but when you go into *hill and glen,* they are yet *hell for Jackson* and his measures." If the presidential action was generally unpopular throughout the state, the Jacksonian lieutenants reminded the "sovereigns" of the Old Hero's previous exertions on their behalf. "We will suppose, for argument's sake, which we do not for a moment believe," said the Jackson *Mississippian* in 1834, "that General Jackson has acted wrong in removing the deposites. Should we therefore forget the many great services he has rendered to the State?" The Democratic leaders also attempted to convert every controversy into a personal struggle between Jackson and his enemies. When Seargent S. Prentiss spoke at an anti-Van Buren rally in 1832, a heckler interrupted him by shouting, "Hurrah for Jackson." "In short, fellow citizens," Prentiss retorted, "you have now before you the sum and substance of all the arguments of the party—*Hurrah for Jackson!*"[21]

The anti-Jackson forces of Mississippi consisted of many elements. The essential core of the Whig party in the state was the old Adams-and-Clay faction (or National Republicans), poor in numbers but wealthy in talents and money. To this nucleus were added other political leaders who became disenchanted with certain presidential actions. While hardly any Democrats deserted the party over the issues of internal improvements and the recharter of the Bank of the United States, a few broke ranks in the struggle over the tariff and nullification, more renounced their affiliation during the controversy over the removal of the deposits, and an even larger number refused to accept Martin Van Buren as the Old Hero's successor.

The Whigs also won some converts because of disputes over presidential patronage. Benjamin Grubb Humphreys, adopting the terminology of a later era, attributed his youthful Whiggery partially to Jackson's insistence upon "filling all Federal offices in Mississippi with carpetbaggers from Tennessee." The Democrats complained that "no man

[20] "Autobiography of Wiley P. Harris," in Rowland, *Courts, Judges, and Lawyers of Mississippi,*" 277; Vicksburg *Register,* December 24, 1835.

[21] Buckner Harris to John Black, May 1, 1834, in Vicksburg *Register,* April 23, 1835; Jackson *Mississippian,* March 14, 1834; Prentiss (ed.), *Memoir of S. S. Prentiss,* I, 166.

has been elected to Congress from this State, who did not 'Huzza for Jackson,' when he was a candidate . . ., but scarcely do they take their seats in that body, before they begin to see new light, and oppose the administration they were sent to support." Yet one important factor contributing to the deflection of Mississippi congressmen from the Jackson ranks was the President's disinclination to consult them regarding patronage matters. Early in his senatorial career George Poindexter declared that no applicant for any office in Mississippi could be successful without the support of William B. Lewis, Amos Kendall, and John H. Eaton. After 1832 Samuel and William M. Gwin, leaders of the state Regency, were the virtual dictators of federal patronage in Mississippi. Representative Franklin E. Plummer protested that while he supported presidential policies in Congress the "office-holders, office-seekers, and prominent friends of Jackson" in his state claimed "as the exclusive friends of the administration, the spoils of victory." Senator John Black, although elected as a "strong Jackson man," soon discovered in Washington that he too learned "nothing except second-handed." Regarding the influence of the Gwins, he once stated that "Mississippi is looked upon as their plantation . . . by those whose olfactories inhale the sweet steams of the kitchen."[22]

In one significant respect the Democratic party in Mississippi had changed considerably by the time of Jackson's death. In 1833 that state had vigorously supported his stand against nullification. During the following years, however, the party re-examined its position concerning the nature of the Union, for the northern anti-slavery crusade began at a time when the state's economy and society were becoming increasingly interwoven with the institution of slavery. By 1839 the Mississippi Democracy was willing to accept the principles of the State Rights faction in exchange for their political support. During the eighteen-forties and eighteen-fifties the state furnished several leaders of the radical southern wing of the Democratic party.

This revolution in the attitude of the Mississippi Democracy is best illustrated by comparing that state's action during the nullification crisis of 1832-1833 with its role in the secession crisis of 1860-1861. In both years the Democratic party controlled state politics. In the earlier instance, after South Carolina had passed its ordinance of nullification, the Mississippi legislature adopted a resolution "indignantly frown[ing] upon the first dawning of every attempt to alienate any

[22] Percy Lee Rainwater (ed.), "The Autobiography of Benjamin Grubb Humphreys, August 26, 1808—December 20, 1882," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review,* XXI (September, 1934), 238; Woodville *Republican,* May 10, 1834; Woodville *Mississippi Democrat,* May 21, 1831, quoting Louisville *Journal; Register of Debates,* 23 Cong., 1 Sess., 4822; Black to John A. Quitman, March 2, 1833, December 15, 1835, Claiborne Papers, Jackson.

portion of our country from the rest." But when the Palmetto State adopted its ordinance of secession in 1860, Mississippi heartily seconded her action. Ironically, fifteen years earlier, the memorial address for Andrew Jackson in Vicksburg had been delivered by Jefferson Davis.[23]

[23] *Mississippi House Journal,* 16 Sess. (January, 1833), 75; Vicksburg *Sentinel,* June 30, 1845.

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